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MacArthur's Airman: General George C. Kenney and the  
Air War in the Southwest Pacific Theater in World War II

by Thomas E. Griffith, Jr.

1996

**MacArthur's Airman: General George C. Kenney**  
**and the Air War in the Southwest Pacific Theater in World War II**

by

**Thomas E. Griffith, Jr.**

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

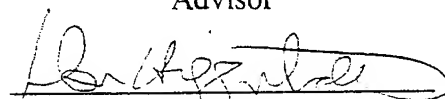
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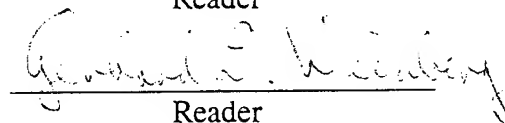
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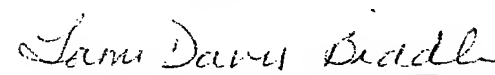
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **MacArthur's Airman: General George C. Kenney and the Air War in the Southwest Pacific Theater in World War II**

**(Under the direction of Richard H. Kohn)**

As the theater air commander in the Southwest Pacific during World War II, General George C. Kenney played a pivotal role in the conduct of the war, but his performance has remained relatively unexplored. The first part of the dissertation concentrates on Kenney's background before World War II. This section details his family history, youth, and experiences as an observation pilot on the Western Front during World War I. It then traces his career in the Army Air Corps through a variety of assignments that expanded his knowledge of aviation and military operations.

The bulk of the work focuses on Kenney's role in planning operations that exploited the advantages of air power to accomplish the objectives set by the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur. Kenney was an innovator, both operationally and organizationally, who willingly junked existing doctrine and tactics if they were ineffective, such as the shift he made to low-level attacks for better bombing results. He quickly grasped the value of ULTRA intelligence and exploited the Allied advantage in breaking the Japanese radio codes in nearly every operation.

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Kenney cultivated a close relationship with MacArthur, which proved problematic in his relations with General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, who supplied Kenney with planes, people, and parts. Kenney's influence on strategic decisions is examined, but because the focus is on the theater level, these decisions and the tactical details of most missions are not discussed in detail. The nature of combat in the Southwest Pacific meant that Kenney worked closely with the ground commanders in the theater, Generals Walter Krueger and Robert Eichelberger as well as the naval commanders, Admirals Thomas Kinkaid and Daniel Barbey.

Kenney's leadership and planning are assessed in the campaigns in Papua, New Guinea; the Huon Peninsula and Markham Valley; the Admiralty Islands; Hollandia; Leyte and Mindoro; Luzon; Okinawa; and, the planning for the invasion of the Japanese home islands (OLYMPIC). In addition, air operations against Rabaul, Formosa, and in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea are discussed in detail.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to a great many people who assisted with this dissertation every step of the way. Like any historian I incurred many debts during this project and, at the risk of leaving someone out, would like to acknowledge those who helped me. Richard Kohn, my advisor, gave valuable help in the research and writing of the dissertation while providing the role model of a teacher, mentor, and citizen. The readers on my committee suggested excellent revisions and the work is much better for the inputs of Gerhard Weinberg, Miles Fletcher, and Don Higginbotham. I would especially like to thank Tami Biddle of my committee for reading several drafts of this paper and offering her extensive insights into the history of air power.

Colonel Phil Meilinger and the faculty at the School of Advanced Airpower Studies started the project by selecting me for the degree program. My thanks; I hope you will find the product valuable.

A grant from the United States Air Force Historical Research Agency funded research trips to Maxwell Air Force Base and the Air Force Institute of Technology helped pay for travel to Washington, D. C. and Norfolk, Virginia. On other trips I relied on the kindness of friends and family. Special thanks to Bill and Joanne Polowitzer, Bob and Denise Griffith, and Greg and Trisha Griffith for opening their homes to me.



For the family background on George Kenney I am indebted to their entire family, especially James Kenney who shared his research on the family genealogy and Dorothy Dodson who kindly allowed me to search through a trunk full of family memories one evening.

Many librarians and archivists assisted in finding documents and other materials, but a few deserve special recognition. Cindy Battis at the Brookline Public Library who searched for details on Kenney's youth. Duane Reed at the United States Air Force Academy Library, Jim Zoebel at the MacArthur Memorial, and Evonne Kincaid at the Center for Air Force History all offered a great deal of help.

I am especially indebted to the many scholars who graciously took time out from their work to patiently answer my questions. Herman Wolk at the Center for Air Force History provided valuable assistance on the Kenney Papers and his insights into the General's service. An interview with Donald Goldstein at the University of Pittsburgh offered me a different perspective on Kenney. Richard Watson at Duke University kindly answered my questions about writing the he did on the Southwest Pacific for the official Air Force history of the war. Peter Faber and DeWitt Copp answered my questions about the Air Corps between the wars, and James Titus kindly gave me access to Martha Byrd's manuscript. Thanks to William Baldwin for leading me through the records at the Corps of Engineers History Office and to Edward Drea for his comments on intelligence and air operations. Two historians in Australia, David Horner and Alan Stephens, went above and beyond the call of duty in answering my inquiries about sources there.

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## Introduction

The United States battleship Missouri was securely anchored in Tokyo Bay on the cloudy morning of September 2, 1945. General George C. Kenney stepped aboard the mighty warship shortly after 8 o' clock that morning and soon thereafter took his place in the front row of dignitaries gathered to witness Japanese representatives sign the surrender documents that would end the bloody war in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> As General Douglas MacArthur's air commander in the Southwest Pacific theater since July 1942, Kenney's operational skill, intellectual flexibility, and technical innovations had made air power a crucial part of the Allied victory.

Kenney's achievements have not gone unrecognized by historians. In his major study of America's war in the Pacific, Eagle Against the Sun, Ronald Spector wrote, "General George C. Kenney found a dispirited and disillusioned air organization, which he quickly overhauled and beat into life."<sup>2</sup> D. Clayton James, perhaps best known for his three volume biography of MacArthur, believed that Kenney was highly

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<sup>1</sup> USS Missouri Deck Log, August 31, September 2, 1945, Quintin S. Lander Papers, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (hereafter identified as MHI); General Headquarters, U.S. Army Pacific, "Instructions for Personnel Attending Surrender Ceremony," September 2, 1945, George C. Kenney Papers, Center for Air Force History, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D. C. (hereafter this source will be identified as KP); George C. Kenney, General Kenney Reports (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949; reprinted, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987) pp. 576-578.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald H. Spector, Eagle Against the Sun (New York: Free Press, 1984; reprinted, Vintage Books, 1985), p. 226.

influential in shaping MacArthur's strategic thinking during the war.<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Perret, author of a recent popular narrative on the Army Air Forces in World War II, rated Kenney a "superb" commander.<sup>4</sup> While most historians give Kenney high marks, at least one student of the war in the Pacific argued that Kenney's achievements were overstated. In his study of Ennis C. Whitehead, Kenney's deputy, historian Donald Goldstein argued that Whitehead, not Kenney, was the "driving force and genius behind the Allied Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific."<sup>5</sup>

This wide range of opinions about Kenney, however, has been based on a very narrow range of sources; the exact methods of Kenney's success have never been examined in-depth. Many of the conclusions made about his accomplishments are based on the official Air Force histories of World War II, written over 40 years ago, and Kenney's own account of the war, published under the title General Kenney Reports.

Relying on this limited array of sources has some obvious shortcomings. The official Air Force histories provide a wealth of detail, and are useful starting points for any research in this area, but they tend to focus on the tactical details of the air fighting and to emphasize the decisiveness of air power in a given campaign. These studies

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<sup>3</sup> D. Clayton James, A Time for Giants (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Perret, Winged Victory: The Army Air Forces in World War II (New York: Random House, 1993) p. 465.

<sup>5</sup> Donald M. Goldstein, "Ennis C. Whitehead, Aerospace Commander and Pioneer" (Ph.d. diss., University of Denver, 1970), pp. 2, 436. Also, Donald M. Goldstein, "Ennis C. Whitehead: Aerial Tactician," in We Shall Return!, ed. William M. Leary (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 207.

downplay the limitations of air power and avoid detailed analysis or criticism of air commanders such as Kenney. In addition, much of the detail about Kenney's methods, especially his reliance on signals intelligence, was not available when the official histories were written. While Kenney's work offers insight into his own personality and ideas on warfare, it is also filled with mistakes about events, exaggerations about his influence in the war and the effectiveness of air power, and distortions by omitting any operation which Kenney, for whatever reason, decided was not important. As one historian put it, an "assessment of [Kenney's] performance is both helped and hindered by his remarkable book."<sup>6</sup> Although Kenney's book is interesting and useful because it reveals the nature of high command for an airmen and how air power shaped operations in the war, in the end his work is a memoir, not a history, and it exhibits many of the shortcomings and strengths of that genre.

The result, in the history of both air warfare and operations in the Southwest Pacific, is an incomplete picture of the effect of air power and George Kenney's leadership. In the Southwest Pacific theater air power was, according to Ronald Spector, "the dominant element."<sup>7</sup> Despite this acknowledgment, Spector devoted much more attention to ground combat than he did to air operations. In his coverage of the American invasion of the Philippines, for example, he acknowledged the problems that resulted from the failure to construct airfields quickly, but he did not examine the

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<sup>6</sup> David Horner, "Strategy and Higher Command, " in RAAF in the Southwest Pacific 1942-1945 (Canberra: RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, 1993), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Spector, Eagle, p. 228.

lapse in any detail. Conversely, his analysis of the ground actions was substantial.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the many roles that air power played in the Southwest Pacific and because Kenney was the key figure in its direction, my analysis of his methods will fill in both the details of his operations and analyze his contribution to the war in the Southwest Pacific.

The lack of any biographical study of Kenney and his methods of air warfare points out a major shortcoming in the history of air warfare: the paucity of detailed studies on air leaders in general.<sup>9</sup> Despite the importance of air power in warfare during the last half of the 20th century, and the amount of ink spilled by historians about the methods of air warfare and the motivations of the air commanders, the number of studies about leading airmen remains surprisingly small.<sup>10</sup> In a comprehensive survey on the biographies of air leaders, historian Philip Meilinger

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 511-517.

<sup>9</sup> By comparison one of Kenney's ground counterparts, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, has been the subject of two biographical studies and one edited volume, John F. Shortal, Forged by Fire: General Robert L. Eichelberger and the Pacific War (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1987); Paul Chwialkowski, In Caesar's Shadow: The Life of General Robert Eichelberger (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993); Jay Luvaas, ed., Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1972). Herman Wolk has done the most to illuminate Kenney's contributions: Herman S. Wolk, "George C. Kenney: The Great Innovator," in Makers of the United States Air Force, ed. John L. Frisbee (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987), pp. 127-150 covers Kenney's entire career, while "George C. Kenney: MacArthur's Premier Airmen," in Leary, 88-114, concentrates on Kenney's role in World War II. Alexis Gregory Grynkeiwich's masters thesis on Kenney, "'Advisable in the National Interest?' The Relief of General George C. Kenney," M.A. Thesis, University of Georgia, 1994, concentrates on Kenney's relationship with other Air Force leaders and his dismissal as the commander of Strategic Air Command in 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley L. Falk, "Gaps in the Published History of the Air Force: Challenge for Historians," The Historian 44 (August 1982):457-458; Noel F. Parrish, "The Influence of Air Power upon Historians," pp. 36-37 and David MacIsaac, "Leadership in the Old Air Force: A Postgraduate Assignment," pp. 91-92 in The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1959-1987, ed. Harry R. Borowski (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1988).

found few works that are truly scholarly studies and as tendency to focus on the lives of a few very public figures.<sup>11</sup> A biographical study of George Kenney that covers his career both before and during World War II is one step towards understanding the perspective of airmen in World War II and correcting the historical deficit in understanding air power and its role in the Southwest Pacific.

Because the focus of this work is on George Kenney, the first section details his personal and military background, the source of many of his ideas about air warfare. The remainder of the study explains and evaluates his record of command in World War II in employing air power both independently and in operations with ground and naval forces. While I examined a variety of sources for understanding Kenney's role, like other historians who cover this period, I used Kenney's own account both for the details it offers and for an understanding of how Kenney viewed the war. Because of the problems with this memoir in understanding the war, and a propensity for some writers to rely on it for more than Kenney's impressions, I have attempted to correct the record and point out errors in his book where possible.

By virtue of his position, Kenney was primarily involved in planning future operations: he focused on the overall theater application of air power and therefore this analysis will likewise attend to the theater level of operations. Strategic decisions about the overall conduct of the war will be included both to provide the context for operations and to determine Kenney's impact on those strategic decisions. Likewise, individual air engagements and bombing missions will be cited where appropriate, but

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<sup>11</sup> Philip S. Meilinger, American Airpower Biography: A Survey of the Field (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1995), pp. 60-62.

not usually dissected in great detail. Ultimately, the outcome of individual battles rested with the aircrews flying to the targets; once the aircraft lifted off, all Kenney could do was sit and wait for the results and begin planning again.

Kenney's success in employing air power rested on his knowledge of modern warfare and a strong belief in the unique contribution of air power to military operations. The most important task for the air force, he believed, was to reduce, if not eliminate, the ability of the enemy to interfere with friendly operations. The first aim of an air commander was to gain the unimpeded use of the air space: in short, to control the air. This would allow friendly air and surface forces the ability to pursue actions free from interference from the enemy. With air superiority established, aircraft could attack enemy ground troops far behind the front lines, bomb supply areas, roads, or even factories, thereby reducing their ability to wage war. In Kenney's opinion, aircraft were misused if they were only employed as substitutes for artillery and dedicated to bombing the enemy forces on the front lines.

Although Kenney was dogmatic in his ideas about the purpose of air power, he was extremely flexible in the implementation. He was willing and able to change almost any aspect of his command in the pursuit of his aims. He junked unsuitable tactics, rewarded initiative in modifications to aircraft, and adapted his organization to the constraints and opportunities presented by a situation. The means, he believed, should always be adapted to the ends--whatever was necessary to get the job done. Indeed, flexibility and adaptations were the hallmarks of Kenney's leadership.



Another important factor in Kenney's success was his facility for dealing with the other commanders in the theater. When Kenney arrived in theater he established a close personal and professional relationship with Douglas MacArthur, the theater commander for whom Kenney worked and to whom he reported. Kenney was able to relate to MacArthur on a personal level and brought to him an impressive knowledge of air warfare, an area that MacArthur knew was important, but in which he had no real expertise. Likewise, Kenney recognized and took advantage of the talent and experience of his subordinates, especially Ennis Whitehead, Kenney's deputy commander and the commander of the forward operational headquarters that Kenney established. During Kenney's apprenticeship in the Army he crossed paths with many of the ground and air officers that he would later serve with during the war. While Kenney had no difficulty getting along with his fellow Army officers, Kenney harbored a deep dislike for naval officers. Although by very nature of its geography the Southwest Pacific was at least partly a naval theater, relations between the Navy and Kenney were never very good, and he made few efforts to improve them.

Despite the sometimes antagonistic dealings with other officers, Kenney succeeded in making air power contribute to perhaps its maximum effectiveness--given the constraints of weather, geography, strategy, and resources--in an environment that combined the arms of different services and different nations. The story of George Kenney's role in World War II will not explain every aspect of air warfare in the Southwest Pacific, but it will expand to an understanding of how one airman faced the challenge of commanding an air force in war.

## Chapter One

### The Early Years

**"From then on, I knew that was what I was going to do"<sup>1</sup>**

George Kenney was born on August 6, 1889 in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, the first child of Joseph Atwood Kenney and Anne Louise Churchill. Kenney claimed throughout his life that he was the son of American citizens who were vacationing in Nova Scotia when he was born.<sup>2</sup> He was, in fact, very defensive about the circumstances of his birth. When a reporter who was curious about Kenney's nationality, asked if he was Canadian, the General snapped, "If a cat has kittens in the oven, you don't call them biscuits."<sup>3</sup> A careful look at his family's history reveals that George Kenney was mistaken. The Kenney's resided in Nova Scotia for many years, making him more Canadian than he might have believed.

The first of the Kenneys to the new world, however, did settle in New England. Although there is no indication that a Kenney was among the Mayflower families, the

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<sup>1</sup> George C. Kenney, interview with James C. Hasdorff, August 10-21, 1974, Bay Harbor Island, Florida, p. 9, file K239,0512-806 HRA.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, "Battle of the Pacific," Time, January 18, 1943, p. 28 for the circumstances of Kenney's birth. In all of his biographical sketches and oral history interviews Kenney repeats the same story.

<sup>3</sup> James Kenney, letter to author, February 26, 1994.

Kenneys can trace their heritage, through marriage, back to two of the original Mayflower settlers.<sup>4</sup> The first recorded evidence of the Kenney name in America was dated to September 24, 1662, when John Keayne, an inn keeper in Boston, bought a house and some land near the center of Quincy, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> The family of George Kenney's mother, Anna Louise Churchill, also traced their roots back to an early settler to America--the first Churchill settled in New England in 1643.<sup>6</sup>

The Kenneys were primarily fishermen and merchants and remained in the Boston area until 1761 when the family migrated to Nova Scotia with a number of other English settlers. Nova Scotia was originally a French colony in North America, but during the Seven Years War between France and England the territory was taken over by the British. In 1758 the British governor of Nova Scotia, Charles Lawrence, established a colonial assembly and recruited settlers from New England in order to ensure English control of the area.<sup>7</sup> The favorable terms offered to the potential

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<sup>4</sup> Roland W. Kenney, "The Kenney Family Tree," unpublished manuscript, Farmington, Connecticut, 1973, copied from Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana, pp. 3-4, 15, 44-45 copy in author's possession. The Kenneys still base their claim of their Mayflower connections through marriage to the descendents of Stephen Hopkins and William Brewster, both members of the Mayflower company, making all subsequent offspring Mayflower descendents. Information on the early Kenney family can also be found in Florance L. K. Robertson, "Keeney, Keny Family of Milton, Mass., and Nova Scotia, Canada," in Genealogies of Mayflower Families, selected and introduced by Gary Boyd Roberts (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1985), pp. 413-434.

<sup>5</sup> Kenney "Kenney Family Tree," pp. 3-5. There were many variations of the family name in the colonial records such as Keayne, Keny, Kene, Keyne, Kenny, Keney, Kanney, Keene, and Keen, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Yarmouth Genealogies, No. 70, The Churchill Family" Yarmouth Herald, December 6, 1898, p.1, December 27, 1898, p. 1, Kenney Papers, file 168.7103-25 HRA.

<sup>7</sup> George Rawlyk, Nova Scotia's Massachusetts: A Study of Massachusetts-Nova Scotia Relations, 1630-1784 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), pp. 217-219; Edwin Crowell, History of Barrington Township (Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, n.p., 1923; reprint ed. Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing, 1973), pp. 66-73; Marcus Lee Hansen and John Bartlet Brebner, The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1940), p. 30.

settlers, combined with the enthusiastic reports on the attractive conditions in Nova Scotia by agents sent from New England to investigate the territory in 1759, spurred interest in the area.<sup>8</sup> Although the individual motives for moving varied among the settlers, for fishing families, like the Kenneys, who frequently stopped in Nova Scotia on their expeditions to the fishing grounds in the North Atlantic, the move simply changed a temporary way-station into a permanent home.<sup>9</sup> In 1761 Herman Kenney, a direct ancestor of George Kenney, settled in Barrington, Nova Scotia, and became the first magistrate of the town.<sup>10</sup> By 1763 at least 5000 people had moved from New England to Nova Scotia and, despite an influx of immigrants from other countries to Nova Scotia, the area along the southern coast became, in the words of one historian, a "New New England."<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the similarity with its sister land to the south, Nova Scotia did not experience the political changes of the New England colonies and consequently did not join with the rebels during the American Revolution.<sup>12</sup> The political separation of Nova Scotia from Massachusetts that occurred after the American Revolution did little,

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<sup>8</sup> Rawlyk, p. 219-220.

<sup>9</sup> Rawlyk, pp. 217-228; Crowell, pp. 82-85; John Bartlet Bebner, The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), pp. 26-29, 55-56; Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," pp. 5-21.

<sup>10</sup> Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," pp. 19, 21; Crowell, pp. 153, 147, 504.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Rawlyk, p. 221-222. Also see Brebner, Chapter 7; Crowell, p. 61. Rawlyk uses a figure of 5000 immigrants, Crowell 7000.

<sup>12</sup> Brebner, pp. 309-310.

however, to disrupt the pre-war pattern of social, cultural, and economic ties between the residents of southern Nova Scotia and New England.<sup>13</sup>

The Kenneys remained in Nova Scotia after the Revolutionary War and continued to make their homes in the southern part of the region. George Kenney's father, Joseph Kenney, was born in Barrington, Nova Scotia, on November 25, 1862, the oldest child of James Colwell Kenney and Sarah Jane Crowell.<sup>14</sup> Joe, as he was called, was a handsome young man with a striking singing voice; Edith Porter, a cousin of George Kenney, thought Joe had "one of the most beautiful voices" in the world.<sup>15</sup> No doubt this singing talent is what attracted the attention of Anne Louise Churchill, daughter of the famous sea captain George Washington Churchill. The two met in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, where Joe had been hired as a singer in a church and were married there on November 16, 1888.<sup>16</sup>

Although both Joe and Anne had long-standing family ties to Nova Scotia and both were born there, Joe's parents had moved to Beverly, Massachusetts in 1882 and sometime around 1900 Joe and Anne Kenney followed, settling in Brookline, Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup> Whether Joe and Anne relocated to the United States any earlier is

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<sup>13</sup> Rawlyk, pp. 222-223.

<sup>14</sup> Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," pp. 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> Edith Porter, interview with James Kenney, p. 6, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1982; Roland Kenney, letter to James Kenney, February 27, 1994, both in author's possession.

<sup>16</sup> Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," p. 33; James Kenney, letter to author, February 26, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," p. 32. There is no record of the move, but Joseph Kenney is first listed in the poll tax records in 1900, the year after George was born. Brookline Massachusetts Poll Tax list, Public Library of Brookline, Massachusetts. I am grateful to Cindy Battis, Collection Development Librarian, Public Library of Brookline, for providing this information.

unclear, but even after this move the couple traveled frequently between Massachusetts and Nova Scotia. Although George Kenney was born in Yarmouth, Gertrude, the second child of Joe and Anne, was born in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1892. The two youngest children in the family, Ruth and Arthur, were both born in Nova Scotia: Ruth in 1893, Arthur in 1894.<sup>18</sup>

The decision by Joe and Anne Kenney to relocate was probably inspired by economic necessity. Prosperity in the maritime provinces depended on exporting lumber and fish to the United States, but in 1886 an American tariff on fish effectively closed this market for Nova Scotian fishermen, causing many of them to emigrate to the United States to find work on American vessels. While opportunities were decreasing in Nova Scotia the opposite was true in the United States where the industrialization of the late 19th and early 20th century had expanded employment opportunities.<sup>19</sup> The net result was high unemployment in Nova Scotia, but ample employment opportunities in the United States. Boston became, according to one scholar, the "goal of ambitious youth."<sup>20</sup>

With Joe Kenney's move to Boston the family completed a circle of migration back to the United States that began in 1761. They were, at least according to political boundaries, Canadian citizens. Yet despite this formal definition of nationality, the family, like the earlier settlers to this region of Nova Scotia, viewed themselves as

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<sup>18</sup> Kenney, "Kenney Family Tree," p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Hansen, pp. 208-210, 242; Harvey, p. 45; Crowell, pp. 422-423.

<sup>20</sup> Hansen p. 209. While Hansen is referring to an earlier time period, the same phenomenon held true during the time that Joe Kenney emigrated, see p. 242.



American citizens rather than Canadian. Their perceptions were helped by the fact that until the middle of the 20th century the border between the United States and Canada was not closely monitored by government officials, making it relatively easy for families to move between the two countries.<sup>21</sup> George Kenney's claim to American citizenship remains tenuous and reflected more of the belief he had in his nationality rather than a strict interpretation of the circumstances of his birth.<sup>22</sup>

When George Kenney's family moved to the United States they lived in the working class section of Brookline. His father, Joe, worked as a carpenter and then as a driver for a plumbing company.<sup>23</sup> To help the family financially, George's mother worked as a dressmaker in Boston and may have rented out rooms in their house at 10 Davis Avenue.<sup>24</sup> For a time she traveled every summer back to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia where she managed a vacation house.<sup>25</sup> George Kenney went to Pierce Grammar School and graduated from Brookline High School in 1907.<sup>26</sup> Although unmemorable

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<sup>21</sup> David D. Harvey, Americans in Canada: Migration and Settlement Since 1840 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), pp. iv-v; Kenneth Lines, British and Canadian Immigration to the United States Since 1920 (San Francisco, Ca.: R & E Research Associates, Inc., 1978), pp. 2, 57-58. For more on the problems in tracing these cross-border movements see Hansen, pp. vi, 246-247.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Dodson (George Kenney's niece), interview with author, Arlington, Virginia, May 22, 1995. Later in life Arthur Kenney, George's younger brother, had difficulty proving his citizenship because he did not have a birth certificate and claimed George encountered similar problems. Arthur Kenney, interview with James Kenney, Los Angeles, California, 1980, p. 4. There was no record of George's naturalization, but, as far as the records show, his assertion about his citizenship was never questioned.

<sup>23</sup> Brookline Poll Tax list; Brookline Directory, Public Library of Brookline, Massachusetts.

<sup>24</sup> Edith Porter, interview with James Kenney, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>25</sup> "Kenney Family Tree," p. 33; Edith Porter, interview with Kenney, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>26</sup> William R. Callahan, "Brookline Boy Takes Command of our Air Force in Pacific," Boston Globe, September 16, 1942, p. 1.

as a scholar or athlete, he was nevertheless accepted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he studied civil engineering.<sup>27</sup> In addition to his studies at MIT, George also discovered that he had some talent as a writer. He worked on the school newspaper, The Tech, and was a member of the paper's editorial board.<sup>28</sup> Kenney earned money for school by writing for a newspaper and later developed a service that provided campus news to the Boston Journal, the Boston Record, and the Boston Advertiser.<sup>29</sup>

Sometime in 1909 Joe Kenney left the family, an event that forced George, as the male head of the household, into the role as the primary economic supporter of the family.<sup>30</sup> The exact reasons for Joe Kenney's disappearance remain murky. According to one source, Joe and two other men were accused of embezzeling \$20,000 from a company and left the area to avoid prosecution.<sup>31</sup> Another relative, however, gave a more prosaic explanation: Joe left the family because he could no longer get along with his wife.<sup>32</sup> It seems, based on the fact that Joe Kenney was a driver for a plumber, that domestic strife was the reason he left home.

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Dame, "A Flying General," Boston Herald, September 8, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Certificate from MIT, from James Kenney, copy in author's possession.

<sup>29</sup> Callahan, pp. 1, 4; Robert Cromie, "Kenney of the Fifth," Chicago Sunday Tribune, November 14, 1943, p. 1; Margarite Kenney, letter to author, April 3, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Brookline Poll Tax list, Brookline Directory, Public Library of Brookline, Massachusetts.

<sup>31</sup> Edith Porter, interview with James Kenney, p. 6; James Kenney, letter to author, February 26, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Kenney, letter to James Kenney, February 27, 1994, copy in author's possession.

Whatever the exact explanation for Joe's disappearance, the episode undoubtedly left its mark on George Kenney, though he never made public any of his feelings. In an unpublished paper he wrote late in life entitled "Personalities," Kenney attempted to define the most important characteristics of the significant or memorable people of his lifetime. Most of the people in the essay were public figures: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and William Knudsen. Significantly, George Kenney made no mention of his father, but wrote instead about his maternal grandfather as an exemplary "personality" and his childhood hero.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps it is not surprising that George Kenney would have remembered his grandfather, George Churchill, so fondly. Not only was young Kenney his namesake, but following Joe Kenney's disappearance, George Churchill was probably the closest he had to a father figure. Kenney was undoubtedly proud of the dashing sea captain whose exploits could truly be described as heroic. Probably the most dramatic incident occurred on a voyage in 1886 from Quebec to Glasgow, Scotland. During the trip the ship's rudder was lost during a heavy storm, threatening to strand the boat in the North Atlantic. Churchill and his crew fashioned a makeshift rudder that allowed them to continue the voyage, but the heavy seas continued to tear at the ship. In the end, they created six replacement rudders, and, after 68 harrowing days at sea, finally made it to

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<sup>33</sup> Kenney does not mention his father in any oral histories or interviews, and his grandfather was the only family member Kenney mentioned in the essay. George C. Kenney, "Personalities " handwritten manuscript, n.d., file 168.7103-26 HRA. William Knudsen was a member of the National Defense Advisory Commission during World War II in charge of coordinating aircraft production, I. B. Holley, Jr., Buying Aircraft: Matériel Procurement for the Army Air Forces (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), pp. 254-257.

port. He earned the nickname "Seven-rudder" Churchill and praise on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps, in some measure, George Kenney tried to emulate his grandfather's exploits in his own life.

In the year following his father's disappearance, while still at MIT, Kenney attended a flying competition sponsored by Harvard University and the city of Boston, an event that literally changed his life. This gathering, called an air meet, held in September 1910, was the first large air competition of its kind in the United States. The meet lasted ten days and involved twenty-two aviators flying thirteen different kinds of aircraft competing for prizes in various categories including highest altitude, fastest and slowest speed, landing accuracy, and distance flown. Among the airmen invited was Claude Grahame-White of England, one of the "five leading aviators in the world" according to the New York Times and the aviator who would have the greatest impact on young George Kenney.<sup>35</sup>

Claude Grahame-White was an upper-class Englishman who assisted in the construction of his own airplane and made his first flight, with little or no instruction, in 1909. He started the first flying school in England and gained wide public recognition during an attempt to capture the £10,000 prize offered by the Daily Mail for the first flight from London to Manchester. Although unsuccessful in this

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<sup>34</sup> "Kenney Family Tree," p. 33; Roland Kenney, "General George C. Kenney, USAF," unpublished manuscript, p. 1; Edith Porter, interview with James Kenney, pp. 4-6. Captain Churchill was also given a certificate of appreciation by the insurance company. I am grateful to Dorothy Dodson for showing the certificate to me.

<sup>35</sup> New York Times, September 2, 1910, p. 1. Graham Wallace, Claude Grahame-White A Biography (London: Putnam, 1960), pp. 96-97.

endeavor, his efforts during the flight, aided by laudatory news accounts from friendly reporters as well as Grahame-White's instincts for self-promotion, made him an air hero and celebrity in Great Britain.<sup>36</sup> The Englishman quickly became a crowd favorite in Boston too. He flew every day during the competition, despite difficult weather conditions that grounded other flyers, and won a number of prizes including the award for the fastest speed around a designated course and the highest altitude reached during the meet. In addition, he was the only competitor who took the challenge offered by the Boston Globe to fly twice around the lighthouse in Boston harbor, a distance of 33 miles from the site of the meet in Cambridge.<sup>37</sup> The manager of the air meet lauded Grahame-White's participation, calling the aviator "the savior of the meet . . . if it had not been for his willing and active work . . . the meet would have fallen below par."<sup>38</sup> To be sure, Grahame-White was handsomely rewarded for his efforts and earned over \$31,000, including \$10,000 for his flight around the Boston Light.<sup>39</sup>

Not surprisingly, the air meet drew the attention of many Boston residents, including twenty-one year old George Kenney, who, years later, remembered two details about that event. The first was Graham-White's winning a prize for flying to

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Paris, "The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism: c.1890-1918," Journal of Contemporary History 28 (January 1993):130; Wallace, pp. 51-76.

<sup>37</sup> New York Times, September 8, 1910, p. 4; September 14, 1910, p. 4; Wallace, pp. 104-105.

<sup>38</sup> New York Times, September 16, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> New York Times, September 14, 1910, p. 4. Part of his winnings was the \$5000 first prize in bombing accuracy. According to the Times, this bombing competition was the first held in the United States.

the lighthouse in Boston harbor.<sup>40</sup> Kenney also recalled that at one point he helped the famous aviator with some menial task and was rewarded for his efforts with a short flight.<sup>41</sup> As he later recalled the experience was a monumental event in Kenney's life. "From then on," he later recounted, "I knew that was what I was going to do."<sup>42</sup>

No doubt the widespread public fascination with aviation in this era further fanned Kenney's interest in aviation and shortly after his first flight with Grahame-White, Kenney and a few friends built their own airplane.<sup>43</sup> They modeled their aircraft on the monoplane design used by the Frenchman Louis Blériot to fly across the English Channel in 1909 and flown by Grahame-White at the Boston air show in 1910.<sup>44</sup> Apparently Kenney and the other young aviators had not quite mastered the knack of aircraft construction. The ten horsepower 1903 Ford engine they used was not powerful enough to lift the airframe more than "four or five feet off the ground."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 8, Kenney mistakenly believed that the prize was \$5000. Robert Cromie, "Kenney of the Fifth!" Chicago Sunday Tribune, November 14, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 8-9; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 128. In the interview with Hasdorff, Kenney recalled that Grahame-White charged ten dollars for a fifteen minute flight. In reality the aviator was so swamped by people hoping to fly that his manager charged \$500 for a five minute flight. Wallace, p. 102. He earned over \$2000 flying passengers during the meet. New York Times, September 14, 1910.

<sup>42</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> For insight into public's fascination with aviation in this era see Joseph J. Corn, The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), passim, but in particular pp. 8-10, 135 and Robert Wohl, A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1090-1919 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 10; New York Times, September 9, 1910, p. 4. For Blériot see Mike Spick, Milestones of Manned Flight (New York: Smithmark Publishers, Inc., 1994), pp. 20-23.

<sup>45</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 11.

When Kenney tried to turn the aircraft it stalled, crashed, and sank into the Saugus River northeast of Boston, a humble beginning for a future combat pilot and Air Force General.<sup>46</sup>

Kenney was scheduled to graduate from MIT in 1911, but he left school that year, later claiming that he was "getting kind of bored."<sup>47</sup> While school may have seemed boring after the excitement of his first flights, family financial problems, the result of his father's disappearance, were probably a greater consideration in his decision to drop out of MIT.<sup>48</sup> After leaving MIT George Kenney had a number of different jobs. He moved to Quebec, Canada and worked as a surveyor for the Quebec Saguenay Railroad from 1911 until 1913.<sup>49</sup> In 1913 Kenney moved back to Boston. The year prior his mother had died unexpectedly from anethesia administered during an operation, and Kenney might have moved to be closer to his younger brother and sisters.<sup>50</sup> He was hired by the Stone and Webster Engineering Corporation, one of the top construction firms in the country, to work on building the new campus at MIT.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.; James Kenney, letter to author, February 26, 1994; Cromie, p. 1; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 128.

<sup>47</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 2; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> James Kenney, letter to author, February 26, 1994; Margarite Kenney, letter to author, April 3, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 2; George C. Kenney, "Biographical Sketch," n.d. (1953?), file 168.7103-34 HRA.

<sup>50</sup> Louise Kenney died during an operation for a fibroid uterus. Louise C. Kenney Death Certificate, copy in author's possession; interview with Dorothy Dodson.

<sup>51</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 3; Kenney, "Biographical Sketch;" Samuel C. Prescott, When M.I.T. Was "Boston Tech" 1861-1916 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Technology Press, 1954), pp. 264-267.

In 1914 Kenney was briefly back with the railroads, this time as a civil engineer building a new bridge at New London, Connecticut for the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad.<sup>52</sup> After that project ended Kenney and a close friend from high school, Gordon Glazier, began their own general contracting firm--the Beaver Contracting and Engineering Corporation.<sup>53</sup> They built roads, office buildings, and houses, and participated in some bigger projects such as the construction of the sea wall at Winthrop, Massachusetts and the bridge over the Squannacock River.<sup>54</sup>

Engineering work appealed to Kenney and he enjoyed solving all of the problems involved in a project. Hydraulic engineering, constructing special pilings and foundations to support a structure in swamps or the wet ground near rivers, especially appealed to him because it involved special challenges and called for innovative solutions. As far as he was concerned once those problems were solved, "well, it was just simple--pouring concrete."<sup>55</sup>

There is no indication that Kenney did any more flying during this time. The young engineer was too busy working and building up his own company. It is also likely that he simply did not have the money to fly. His father's departure and mother's death made him the supporter for his surviving younger brother and sister leaving him with little extra money. Nevertheless, Kenney was gaining management

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<sup>52</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 5-6;

<sup>53</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 5-7; Dodson, interview with author; "Kenney Family Tree," p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 6-7; Dame, p. 1; Callahan, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 5-6.



and leadership experience as well as practical knowledge to augment his school work in engineering at MIT. The construction work almost never went as planned, making improvisation and flexibility key to completing the projects.<sup>56</sup> His supervisory position required that Kenney bring together the work of several different subcontractors. In doing so, he gained an ability to react to current circumstances as well as forecast for the future. These work experiences, and in particular owning his own company, in combination with the family responsibilities thrust on him at a relatively young age, gave Kenney a sense of maturity and knowledge of the practical world beyond that of his peers.

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<sup>56</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 5-7.

## **Chapter Two**

### **World War I**

#### **"We lost a lot of people in that 91st Squadron"<sup>1</sup>**

Like so many other Americans George Kenney's life rapidly changed in the spring of 1917. On April 2, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany and Wilson's decision to enter the war provided Kenney with an opportunity to move from his career as a civil engineer and businessman into aviation. He immediately wrote to the War Department and inquired about entering aviation training, but was told that there were no vacancies at the moment. A short time later an enterprising recruiting sergeant in downtown Boston told Kenney that if he joined the army that day he would be sent to France immediately and be "flying at the front" in a week. While Kenney was sorely tempted by the offer he wisely found it too good to believe.<sup>2</sup> "Luckily," as he put it, a letter from the War Department arrived a few days later advising him that if he passed a physical examination he would be admitted to ground school.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 12; Cromie, p. 1.

Kenney's delay in beginning flying training was part of the larger mobilization problems that affected the United States Army as it prepared to enter the World War. If the Army could be described as small at the start of the war, the fledgling air service was minuscule. In fact, no separate air arm or branch for aviation existed in the United States Army prior to the war. Instead, responsibility for aviation matters rested with the Aviation Division of the U.S. Army Signal Corps which contained 65 officers, only 26 aviators, to fly the Army's approximately 200, mostly out-of-date, aircraft. The airmen in the United States army were in no position to contribute to the air war over western Europe in the near future.<sup>4</sup> The first step for the Aviation Division, as for the rest of the army, was expansion and mobilization.

Training as an army aviator in World War I began when a volunteer, enlisted in the Signal Corps reserve and attended the eight week ground school or basic training phase at one of several universities around the country.<sup>5</sup> Like the basic military training for pilots conducted by the European countries already at war, the American program provided an indoctrination to the military, furnished an academic introduction to the mysteries of flight, and eliminated those considered by the military unsuited for flying--approximately twenty-five percent of those who entered the ground school.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I. B. Holley, Jr., Ideas and Weapons (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952; reprinted, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), pp. 27, 37; John H. Morrow, Jr., The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 265.

<sup>5</sup> The course was later lengthened to twelve weeks. James J. Hudson, Hostile Skies: A Combat History of the American Air Service in World War I (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1968), pp. 27-28; Maurer Maurer, The U.S. Air Service in World War I, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1979), 4:xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Hudson, p. 28; Hiram Bingham, An Explorer in the Air Service (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1920), pp. 21, 47-48; Millie Glasebrook, ed., American Aviators in the Great War

Whatever the background of the individual, basic training was always something of a shock. Although they would not be ground soldiers, aviation cadets still had to learn the rudiments of military life: how to march, how to wear a uniform, and even, in the words of one aviator, how "to take down and reassemble a Lewis machine gun blindfolded."<sup>7</sup> In addition to their military studies, cadets also learned Morse code, air navigation, flight theory, engine repair and meteorology and participated in rigorous physical fitness training.<sup>8</sup> The pace was frantic. Cadets were awakened by reveille for a morning run at five-thirty. They attended classes until late afternoon and then practiced marching until dinner. A study period followed the evening meal and at nine-thirty the cadets went to bed.<sup>9</sup> One former cadet later quipped, "Ground school remains more of a nightmare than a dream."<sup>10</sup>

Kenney officially began his aviation training on June 2, 1917 when he enlisted in the Signal Corps reserve and returned to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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1914-1918 (Carson City, Nevada.: Glasebrook Foundation, 1984), p. 141. For the universality of this training see Lee Kennett, The First Air War, 1914-1918 (New York: The Free Press, 1981), p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Quote from George H. Beverley, Pioneer in the U.S. Air Corps: The Memoirs of Brigadier General George H. Beverley (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982), p. 14; Hudson, p. 28. The emphasis on this military training and the account of the Lewis machine gun are common refrains in the personal narratives of World War I aviators. For other examples see Howard R. Craig, Sunward I've Climbed: A Personal Narrative of Peace and War (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1975), pp. 10-16; Norman Archibald, Heaven High, Hell Deep, 1917-1918 (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1935; reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1980), pp. 8-11; Dean C. Smith, By the Seat of My Pants (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), pp. 40-42.

<sup>8</sup> Hudson, p. 28; Craig, pp. 10-16; Archibald, pp. 8-11; Smith, pp. 40-42.

<sup>9</sup> Archibald, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, p. 41.

for ground school.<sup>11</sup> Opened for training only two weeks earlier, and one of the first universities to begin ground school, MIT was a logical location for academic instruction because it was one of the leading universities in the country for aeronautical engineering and had established an aerodynamics laboratory in 1914.<sup>12</sup>

Kenney spent June and July at MIT and completed his ground training with no difficulty. His prior academic experiences at MIT likely gave him an advantage over those who entered the training without any engineering background and his work experience, both as an employee and as the owner of his own business, gave him an added maturity that helped him overcome the difficulties that others experienced in the program.<sup>13</sup>

After successfully completing ground training, fledgling aviators were sent to an Army airfield for flight instruction in the Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny." After some ground instruction and several flights with an instructor who taught basic procedures for getting airborne and back on the ground safely, cadets were sent out alone on a "solo" flight. A successful solo marked a significant event in the airman's training, and those who could not master this phase of flying were quickly mustered out of the program.

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<sup>11</sup> Certificate of Enlistment, courtesy of James Kenney copy in author's possession; Caroline Ticknor, ed., New England Aviators, 1914-1918, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), I:202-203; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 128; Wolk, "Airman," p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Bingham, pp. 46, 53; Jack H. Nunn, "MIT: A University's Contributions to National Defense," Military Affairs Vol. 43, no. 3 (October 1979): 121; Prescott, pp. 283-284. The other universities that established ground schools were the University of California, the University of Texas, the University of Illinois, Ohio State University, Cornell, Princeton and Georgia Tech. Hudson, pp. 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> Of the 797 who entered MIT throughout the war, 622, 77 percent, graduated. Glasebrook, p. 141.

Those cadets who successfully passed this test moved on to more complicated aerial maneuvers such as learning how to land if the engine cut out, how to handle the aircraft when it stalled and began to spin, and how to fly together with other aircraft in formation, a necessity for survival in the air combat arena on the western front.<sup>14</sup> This phase lasted between six and eight weeks and, upon successful completion, cadets were rated as reserve military aviators and commissioned in the Army.<sup>15</sup>

Kenney began his primary flight training at Hazelhurst Field in Mineola, New York, immediately after completing ground school. There he trained under the tutelage of Bert Acosta, a man who would go to win the Pulitzer Trophy in air racing, pilot Commander Richard E. Byrd's transatlantic flight, and become a pilot in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>16</sup> Kenney's most vivid memory in this training was of making his first three landings without power. These early aircraft were notorious for having an engine conk out, but performing an engine-out landing at this early stage of training was not routine.<sup>17</sup> He jokingly told Acosta, "any damned fool can land if the motor is running. I just wanted to see what would happen in case the motor quit."<sup>18</sup> By the middle of September Kenney had successfully completed the flying tests for his rating

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, pp. 54-62.

<sup>15</sup> Hudson, pp. 29-30; Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 4:xviii.

<sup>16</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 12-13; George C. Kenney, "Summary of Activities," n.d.(1953?), Kenney papers, file 168-7103-2 HRA; Ticknor, Vol.1:202-203. For Bert Acosta see Paul O'Neil, Barnstormers and Speed Kings (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1981), p. 84; Sterling Seagrave, Soldiers of Fortune (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1981), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Kennett, pp. 105-107.

<sup>18</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 12-15, quote on p. 13; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 128; Wolk, "Airman," p. 89.

as a reserve military aviator. He received his commission as a 1st Lieutenant in early November 1917 and soon afterwards sailed for France.<sup>19</sup>

When the fighting in Europe erupted in 1914, the impact that aviation would have on the war was still unclear. Contrary to the popular myth, military leaders were not ignorant of the potential capabilities of aircraft prior to the war. Even before the Wright brothers first flight in 1903, officers had been using balloons for bombing and observation. In 1911 aircraft were being used in a number ways in small conflicts, including Italy's use of airborne bombing against the Turks in Libya. By 1914 it was clear that aircraft would serve in the war: the uncertainty was over the size of their impact and the best methods for their use.<sup>20</sup>

The most obvious role for the aircraft were as observation platforms. Gaining the high terrain had traditionally been important in land warfare for a variety of reasons one of the most important was that it gave commanders the ability to observe enemy movements from a distance. Balloons were later used to provide an artificial method for watching the enemy, but they were vulnerable to gunfire and, tethered to the ground, unable to keep up with a moving army. Aircraft, on the other hand, could fly to different areas and return with a detailed report and during the early days of the war aircraft played their most important role in observing enemy troop movements. For

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<sup>19</sup> "Summary of Activities;" "Biographical Sketch;" George C. Kenney Military Personnel Record (201 file kept by the Adjutant General), National Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration, St. Louis, Missouri; Ticknor, 1:202-293. Kenney listed November 5 as his commissioning date, but his 201 file has November 8. While officers usually enter active duty as a 2nd Lieutenant for a time during World War I pilots were commissioned as 1st Lieutenants. In January 1918 this policy changed and pilots entered active duty as 2nd Lieutenants. Craig, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Kennett, pp. 1-21; Morrow, pp. 1-21.

example, in August 1914 reports from French aircraft about the German march on Paris gave French commanders the knowledge they needed to counterattack and stop the German advance.<sup>21</sup>

If observation aircraft gave one side an advantage, the obvious response of the opposing army was to try and eliminate that advantage. To do so required another class of aviation known as fighter, or pursuit, aircraft. Friendly fighters were sent aloft to protect observation balloons and aircraft from enemy fighters and to destroy the enemy's observation craft. A struggle for control of the air soon developed.<sup>22</sup>

Alongside the observation and fighter divisions of aviation came aircraft that were also used to attack targets on the ground. By the end of the war the term "bomber" was being used to describe aircraft that attacked targets in the enemy's homeland, while a fourth category of planes had evolved to attack targets in support of the ground forces--attack aircraft.<sup>23</sup>

Since Kenney's training in the United States provided him with only a rudimentary knowledge of flying, like all new American aviators he arrived in France sorely in need of training in his particular type of aircraft. Since he was classified as a pursuit, or fighter pilot, Kenney was sent to the Third Aviation Instruction Center at Issoudun, France. Issoudun was the largest American training facility in France with over 1000 planes and a dozen separate flying fields. American pursuit pilots were

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<sup>21</sup> Kennett, pp. 23-36; Morrow, pp. xv, 52-55, 63-64, 85-87, 338, 365.

<sup>22</sup> Kennett, pp. 39, 63-68;

<sup>23</sup> Kennett, pp. 41-62, 211-214.



introduced to the French aircraft they would be flying over the front lines and given further instruction in advanced aircraft maneuvers, formation flying, in addition to tips on how to survive in air combat.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, Kenney's arrival at the base in mid-December coincided with the worst flying weather of the year. In a report recording the accomplishments of aviation in the war, the chief of the air service noted that fall rains transformed Issoudan into "a sea of mud."<sup>25</sup> When the aircraft tried to takeoff the mud was thrown up from the wheels of the airplanes and broke the wooden propellers "almost as fast as they could be put on."<sup>26</sup> Since these early aircraft were equipped with only rudimentary flight instruments, the low clouds and rain effectively canceled flying. The poor conditions drastically limited Kenney's flying at the base. When he was assigned, along with eighteen other new pilots, to the newly arrived 91st Aero Squadron in mid-February he left Issoudan before his training was complete.<sup>27</sup>

Kenney and his fellow pilots were upset by the move from training as fighter pilots into an observation unit. Kenney, and presumably others, thought the transfer was punishment for repeatedly breaking regulations at Issoudan.<sup>28</sup> While these pilots may have been guilty of numerous infractions and that motivation cannot be ruled out,

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<sup>24</sup> Bingham, pp. 117-119, 126-129; Hudson, pp. 35-37.

<sup>25</sup> Final Report of the Chief of the Air Service, AEF (hereafter Patrick report), found in Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:93, 97, quote on 1:97.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hudson, p. 82; History of the 91st Aero Squadron, 1917-1918, (Koblenz, Germany: Gebruder Breuer, 1919), pp. 1-3, file Sq-Photo-91-HI HRA.

<sup>28</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 16, 18-19.

more likely they were sent to the 91st simply because the unit had recently arrived in France and were needed to provide some American presence in the war. Kenney and his compatriots may have been the group at Issoudun the longest and hence they were sent to the 91st. As Kenney's comments about being punished suggest, their displeasure and disappointment at the move was triggered less by leaving the base early and more from their assignment to an observation squadron rather than to a pursuit unit.

While all airmen in World War I were regarded as heroic figures in the popular culture, fighter pilots were singled out for particular attention. Certainly the impetus behind this attitude varied. Some people may have felt the skill of the fighter pilot exceeded those flying other aircraft, while other individuals focused on the courage involved. One important factor was the public perception that in an age of mass armies and machine warfare, fighter pilots were the last of the lone warriors engaged in solo combat, making them more heroic.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the exact reason, the view was widespread that fighter pilots were the most elite group in the flying fraternity. Even the chief of training in the air service was forced to admit that airmen viewed observation as "a very unpopular branch of aviation."<sup>30</sup>

While airmen may have disparaged observation, reports from such aircraft had proven invaluable to the ground commanders and two distinct types of observation

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<sup>29</sup> Kennett, Chapter 9; Wohl, *Passion*, Chapter 7; idem, "The Bards of Aviation: Flight and French Culture 1909-1939," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 29 (Summer 1990): 303-327; Paris, pp. 123-141.

<sup>30</sup> Colonel Walter C. Kilner, Chief of Training Section, Air Service, American Expeditionary Force cited in Maurer, *Air Service in World War I*, 4: 330.

aircraft developed over the course of the war. Some observation squadrons worked close to the front lines and were assigned to an army corps commander. Other squadrons, such as the one Kenney was assigned to, were used by higher level army headquarters and flew missions much deeper into enemy territory (25 to 30 miles behind the lines) to photograph troop locations and detect movements that might betray the intentions of the enemy and detect likely areas for impending combat operations.<sup>31</sup>

From February to May 1918, Kenney and the rest of the squadron prepared for combat operations. The squadron had been assigned to fly the Salmson 2A2, a French-built aircraft specifically designed as an observation plane and introduced into service in late 1917.<sup>32</sup> Kenney found the Salmson a "nice, maneuverable job" and, with its 250 horsepower radial engine, faster at combat altitudes than most of the German fighters.<sup>33</sup> During this training Kenney was sidelined by an accident. On March 22, 1918, his engine failed on takeoff and, despite his efforts at practicing such landings during his initial training, his aircraft crashed, breaking his ankle and hand. Apparently the injuries were not too severe as he was back on flying status two months later and flew his first combat mission on June 3.<sup>34</sup> According to the squadron history, the escapade earned him the nickname "Bust-em-up George."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hudson, pp. 131-133; Kennett, pp. 86-87; Lucien H. Thayer, America's First Eagles: The Official History of the U.S. Air Service, A.E.F. (1917-1918), edited Donald Joseph McGee and Roger James Bender (San Jose, Ca.: R. James Bender Publishing and Mesa, Arizona.: Champlin Fighter Museum Press, 1983), pp. 180, 201-202. Thayer was a 2nd Lieutenant assigned in September 1917 to the Air Service Headquarters as a historian, Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:2.

<sup>32</sup> Morrow, pp. 147-148. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 25; Morrow, p. 338.

<sup>34</sup> George C. Kenney Flying Log Books, Kenney Papers, file 168.7013-2, HRA. Although Kenney claims this as a combat mission it was actually classified as a familiarization flight for the

From June until August 1918, the 91st was based at Gondreville, an airfield three miles east of Toul, France, flying under the direction of the French 8th Army.<sup>36</sup> This sector provided a good area for the squadron's introduction to combat with plenty of airfields (helpful in case the novice crews got lost and ran short on fuel) and relatively less enemy activity than other areas of the front, which allowed the aircrews of the 91st the opportunity to perfect the best methods for deep reconnaissance and to resolve problems in photographing enemy positions. Even in the Toul sector, however, the realities of warfare forced the squadron to change some of the procedures developed in training. Heavy German anti-aircraft fire forced the squadron to hike the altitudes of their missions from 10,000 feet to a more survivable 15,000 feet. In addition, German fighter opposition made single-ship missions untenable and the American aviators were forced to fly three or four aircraft together in formation with one or two planes designated as the primary reconnaissance aircraft while the other two guarded against attack by German fighters.<sup>37</sup> On August 22, 1917, in what was likely his first combat engagement, Kenney and his flight tangled with six German Pfalz Scouts. Although Kenney did not record the exact details of this event, he was confident that he had shot down one of the opposing aircraft, but he was not credited

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squadron. The squadron was declared ready for duty on June 6 and flew its first combat mission the next day, June 7, Hudson, p. 83; Maurer, 1:30, 260, 262.

<sup>35</sup> History of the 91st, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> "Summary of Activities," p. 1; Ticknor, I:202-203; Hudson, pp. 83.

<sup>37</sup> Hudson, pp. 131-133; Thayer, pp. 180, 201-202; Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:262-265, 269.

with a victory.<sup>38</sup> Although the squadron was just learning its mission, the squadron's efforts were lauded by French army officers who felt that "no better work had been done at any time during the war by any observation squadron on the western front."<sup>39</sup>

In mid-August, the 91st moved from Toul and was assigned to the headquarters of the American First Army to prepare for the first large-scale American ground combat operation.<sup>40</sup> The impending offensive was designed to reduce a "bulge" in the Allied lines near the French town of St. Mihiel. To coordinate air operations for this offensive, General John J. Pershing gave Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell, the Chief of the Air Service for First Army, control over 1,481 Allied aircraft--the "largest aggregation of air forces" assembled to date on the Western Front.<sup>41</sup>

Mitchell, in turn, assigned most of the deep reconnaissance missions to the 91st Aero squadron. Their mission was to obtain exhaustive details of the German forces and the terrain in the area.<sup>42</sup> Prior to the attack the squadron had pinpointed the location of the German long-range artillery, enabling American artillery to reduce the effectiveness of the German guns. The photographs taken during the buildup to the

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<sup>38</sup> Kenney Log Books, August 22, 1917. In his log books Kenney claims to have shot down a total of six aircraft although he was only officially credited with two.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Patrick report, Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:30.

<sup>40</sup> Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:37.

<sup>41</sup> Maurer, Air Service in World War I, quote on p. 1:37, 3:1-2; Morrow, p. 337; Edward M. Coffman, The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprinted, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 207, 273-278; Alfred F. Hurley, Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 32-36.

<sup>42</sup> Thayer, p. 180, 201-202; Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 11:38.

battle also provided ground commanders with excellent details about the ground over which they would move, key to planning the timing during the impending operation. During the actual ground fighting, the squadron scouted for enemy reinforcements that might be rushed to the area--a contingency never fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>

It was during the fighting around St. Mihiel that Kenney recorded his first official aerial victory. On the morning of September 15, 1918, the first day of good flying weather during the St. Mihiel offensive, Kenney was flying in a flight of four aircraft about 12,000 feet just southeast of Gorze, France. Shortly after crossing the front lines the flight was jumped by six Pfalz scouts and three of the German aircraft converged on Kenney's plane. While Kenney maneuvered wildly to avoid being hit by the German attackers, his observer, William Badham, who had been taking pictures in the back seat, quickly dropped his camera and returned fire with the rear gun. His shots found their mark and one Pfalz went down in flames, apparently discouraging the other two attackers. Despite being "badly shot up," Kenney managed to bring the aircraft home. He had scored his first official victory.<sup>44</sup>

Kenney and the 91st Aero Squadron had little respite after the fighting at St. Mihiel, for on September 26, 1918, American forces began the huge Meuse-Argonne

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<sup>43</sup> Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:269.

<sup>44</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 23; Kenney Log Books, September 15, 1917; Headquarters Air Service, First Army, American Expeditionary Forces, General Order number 13, October 2, 1918, courtesy of James Kenney, copy in author's possession; 91st Aero Squadron, p. 11; Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:38, 3:675-676. Perhaps when Kenney wrote his memoir he felt free to use some artistic license, he stated that he shot down his first aircraft on "the thirteenth." Kenney, Reports, p. 26. That is incorrect; neither his first claim nor his first credited victory came on a thirteenth.

offensive, the largest for the Americans of the war and what turned out to be the last. The objective of this operation was to capture the main German defensive position known as the Kriemhilde Stellung. While the fighting near St. Mihiel lasted only four days, the Meuse-Argonne offensive continued until October 6 and included the heaviest American fighting of the war.<sup>45</sup>

Just prior to fighting the 91st moved to Vavincourt, an airfield closer to the area of American combat operations in the Meuse-Argonne.<sup>46</sup> According to a report written shortly after the war, the squadron members found the new airfield "left much to be desired."<sup>47</sup> In their opinion, the field was too far from the front lines (about 25 miles), had a very uneven runway which caused all sorts of accidents, and, worst of all, was located near the intersection of two main roads which was a prominent bombing target.<sup>48</sup> Despite these drawbacks the squadron stayed at the field and, as in the St. Mihiel offensive, spent the time prior to the ground fighting flying reconnaissance missions to locate and photograph railroad yards and other "important points," such as German artillery emplacements.<sup>49</sup>

During the fighting in the Meuse-Argonne, Kenney was credited with his second victory. On the afternoon of October 9 he was sent with two other aircraft to

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<sup>45</sup> Coffman, pp. 300-301, 328-329.

<sup>46</sup> "Summary of Activities, p. 1."

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:275.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Maurer, Air Service in World War I, 1:275-276.

photograph the German trenches near Jametz. The flyers knew beforehand that this would be a difficult assignment. Army commanders wanted the photos, but bad weather, mechanical problems, and German fighter opposition stymied previous efforts. On this mission Kenney's flew the photo ship and had two wingmen in support when the flight of three was attacked by 50 German fighters. Kenney and his observer Asa Duncan, were jumped by six of the Germans and shot down one Pfalz Scout. After fending off this attack they attempted to continue the mission, but were attacked by more enemy aircraft and had to fight off attackers that had latched on to one of the other aircraft in the flight. Although vastly outnumbered, none of the American aircraft were lost in the melee and each aircraft was able to down a German, but the three American aircraft limped home badly damaged. All of Kenney's instruments on the front panel were shot out and the German bullets had come so close that they cut off the left sleeve of his coat. Just after he landed the left wing fell off and the aircraft had to be scrapped. For his efforts in continuing the mission in the face of stiff enemy opposition and coming to the aid of his wingman, Kenney was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest decoration awarded by the United States Army.<sup>50</sup>

Kenney won high praise for his flying during the war. A report written by an Air Service historian noted: "one of the most outstanding figures in the 91st Squadron was Captain George C. Kenney, who performed some of the most perilous army

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<sup>50</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 23-25; "Fifth Air Force Biographies," file 720.293 HRA; Headquarters Air Service, First Army, American Expeditionary Force, General Order number 20, October 23, 1918, courtesy of James Kenney, copy in author's possession.



command missions in this sector and had more than 100 hours over the line in combat service."<sup>51</sup> Kenney also earned a strong reputation among the members of his squadron. He was an "excellent flyer, courageous . . . could size up the situation quickly" recalled one observer who flew with him.<sup>52</sup> S. Prescott Fay, another member of the 91st, thought Kenney was "one of the ablest, coolest, most courageous pilots in the squadron."<sup>53</sup> Not surprisingly, Kenney's actions in his 75 combat missions were recognized by the Army through promotions and decorations. In late September 1918, he was appointed a flight commander in the 91st, a position only given to experienced pilots. Each flight in an observation squadron contained eleven flying officers plus the commander who was charged with the discipline and well-being of the aviators under his charge. Kenney's selection for this position was an indication of his leadership ability and his performance in combat. He was advanced to the rank of Captain on March 18, 1919 and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star.<sup>54</sup> The Distinguished Service Cross was presented on January 10, 1919 by Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell, the Chief of the Air Service, First Army and regarded as the leading combat airman in the American army, and a man whose exploits helped shape the context of Kenney's experiences in the air service over the

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<sup>51</sup> Thayer, p. 218.

<sup>52</sup> William Badham, interview with George W. Goddard, n.p., May 20, 1966, p. 7, file K239.0512-989, HRA.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Dame, "A Flying General," Boston Herald, September 8, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> "Summary of Activities," p. 1; Cromie, p. 1. For flight organization see table of organization, Observation Squadron, Air Service, Maurer, 4:514, also 4:54. General Headquarters, AEF, Special Order number 77-A, March 18, 1919, Kenney papers, HRA. Wolk, "Innovator," p. 128, Wolk, "Airmen," p. 89, and DeWitt S. Copp, A Few Great Captains (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), p. 280 incorrectly identify Kenney as the commander of the 91st squadron.

next twenty years. Mitchell flew to the airfield the squadron was occupying at Preutin, Germany, to personally present medals to members of the squadron.<sup>55</sup>

When the war ended on November 11, 1918, the 91st could point to a highly successful record. In addition to their photographic work they accounted for 17 of the 26 German aircraft downed by the First Army Observation Group during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The squadron was awarded a number of service decorations and ended the war with four aces (pilots with five or more kills), the most of any observation squadron in the American Air Service.<sup>56</sup>

While Kenney was pleased with his own awards, and the record of the squadron, he was distressed by the losses he saw. The 91st lost about three-quarters of its original pilots--a mortality rate that Kenney blamed on the lack of sufficient, realistic training.<sup>57</sup> When he and the other members of the squadron entered combat, he recalled, "We just knew how to fly an airplane. The first time I ever fired a machine gun in the air was at a German."<sup>58</sup> Perhaps Kenney's arrival at Issoudun in December, during the year's worst flying weather of the year, and his premature

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<sup>55</sup> "Biographical Sketch," p. 3; History of the 91st, pp. 18-20; Hurley, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> Hudson, p. 270; Thayer, pp. 218-219.

<sup>57</sup> In every interview Kenney invariably repeated this same complaint, but often cited different numbers for the losses his squadron suffered. In one session he stated that only nine of the original twenty-four pilots in the squadron survived the war. Kenney, interview with Goddard, p. 6. In his interview with Hasdorff, he claimed that only seven of the fifty-two pilots in the squadron were alive after the war. Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 19. Also George C. Kenney, interview with Marvin Stanley, Washington, D.C., n.d., pp. 5-6, file K239.0512-747 HRA. The exact numbers are probably less important than Kenney's perception of the causes for the losses. For similar criticisms about training see Maurer, IV: 57-58, 67-68, 132-133, 329-330.

<sup>58</sup> Kenney, interview with Goddard, p. 6.

departure from the training base made his situation worse than most, but he was not alone in his complaints.<sup>59</sup>

Although its difficult to measure in any precise fashion it is clear that Kenney's experiences during World War I made a lasting impression on him and had a significant impact on his approach to command in World War II. One of his first impressions when he became the air commander in the southwest Pacific in World War II was that poorly trained airmen being sent to war. This time however Kenney was in a position to do something about the situation. The danger of going to war without the proper training was a lesson he had learned the hard way in World War I, and he "wasn't going to inflict it on these kids in World War II."<sup>60</sup> He yanked scarce bombing units from combat missions to practice navigation and bombing and, against the wishes of people at the headquarters in Washington, established combat training bases in Australia and later in New Guinea.<sup>61</sup> While Kenney's motives for additional training were partly humanitarian, there was also a practical side to these measures. Better training increased the morale of the aviators and resulted in better combat results. In addition, Kenney's emphasis on training translated into fewer losses on combat missions thus preserving aircraft for future operations. In short, training was an investment for the future.

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<sup>59</sup> For weather problems see Morrow, p. 272.

<sup>60</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, George Kenney to H. H. Arnold, December 10, 1942, p.4; Letter, George Kenney to H. H. Arnold, June 19, 1943, p. 2, KP.

Kenney's wartime experience also gave him a sense of the difference between learning about a combat operations in theory and the realities of war. The concept of using an air force to gain air superiority over the enemy became commonplace during World War I. While the idea was retained in discussions about air power in the years afterwards a variety of technological, political, and economic factors pushed strategic bombing to the forefront and led some airmen to downplay the importance of gaining control of the air. Some strategic bombing zealots even went so far as to claim that it would no longer be necessary to defeat the enemy air force and that a "well planned, well organized, well flown air attack will constitute an offensive that cannot be stopped."<sup>62</sup> Perhaps being jumped by 50 German planes and having the left sleeve of his coat shot off made Kenney skeptical of such claims. He was not seduced by promises of being able to accomplish any task, on the ground or in the air, without gaining air superiority. "I stick to one basic principle," he told one officer, "get control of the air before you try anything else."<sup>63</sup>

Kenney's service during the war also led him to realize the importance morale both of the aviators and the people who worked on the ground at the airfields and in the hangers. His chief of staff in Australia would observe that Kenney had "the greatest understanding of the 'kids' who are really doing the tough work, because he can remember his reactions at the front in the last war."<sup>64</sup> Kenney also took away from his

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Frank Futrell, Ideas, Concepts and Doctrine (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1971), p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 21, 1943, KP.

<sup>64</sup> Letter Donald Wilson to Edna Wilson, September 25, 1942, Donald Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

experience in the war a feeling that combat medals were important as a morale booster. He would develop a very liberal attitude toward awarding decorations and Kenney's Fifth Air Force, although only a small portion of the combat air forces in the war (the giant Eighth Air Force in England was four times the size), had ten Medal of Honor recipients, as compared to the seventeen awarded in the Eighth Air Force.<sup>65</sup> "In the long run," he believed, it was "men and morale that wins wars--not machines."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 43; Perret, p. 417.

<sup>66</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, p. 4, Murray Green Collection, Special Collections Division, United States Air Force Academy Library, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Inter-War Years: Preparation for Command**

**"A well-educated officer with war experience"<sup>1</sup>**

At the end of World War I George Kenney was a highly decorated soldier and an accomplished aviator. With the reduction in the size of the American forces after the war Kenney faced a difficult decision. Should he stay in what would undoubtedly be a very small peacetime army and continue flying, or leave the military and return to the business world where he had known earlier success. The desire to fly must have won out, for Kenney remained in the nation's service.

In retrospect, Kenney's assignments between the wars provided him a superb background for his position in World War II as MacArthur's air commander. During these years his career went through three distinct phases. His initial assignments concentrated on the technical side of aviation, the research and development of new aircraft, engines, machine guns, and bombs. The second phase was spent in school, both as a student and an instructor, studying how to use air power and, in conjunction with other combat forces, use it to accomplish the goals of military operations.

Finally, Kenney was a headquarters officer where he learned how to organize large air

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Major General Frank M. Andrews to General Malin Craig, quoted in Copp, Few Great Captains, p. 354.

forces for combat operations. When the United States entered World War II, Kenney was extraordinarily well prepared to fulfill the duties of an air commander and, with his judgment and can-do personality, to impress on others the impact that air power could have on military operations.

### **Border Duty**

After the Armistice ended the First World War, George Kenney and his compatriots in the 91st Aero Squadron stayed briefly in Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. Their duties during the occupation were easy. The squadron did little more than move to different airfields formerly occupied by the German Air Force and inspect the German facilities and aircraft.<sup>2</sup> Kenney returned to the United States in June 1919 and after thirty days of leave he began a new assignment at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.<sup>3</sup> Kenney's transfer to Texas was part of a larger buildup of U.S. forces on the Mexican border in response to unrest in the Mexican state of Chihuahua where the famous Mexican revolutionary leader, Francisco (Pancho) Villa was trying to consolidate his power. American concern about the instability in the region focused on the city of Juarez, just across the border from El Paso, Texas, which was then controlled by the army of General Venustia Carranza, Villa's rival in the region. In June 1919 Villa attempted to establish control over Juarez, a move which threatened

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<sup>2</sup> 91st Aero Squadron, pp. 18-23.

<sup>3</sup> "Biographical Sketch, p. 1;" "Summary of Activities, p. 1;" 201 File; Headquarters Mitchell Field, Special Order Number 96, June 24, 1919; War Department, Special Order Number 177-0, July 30, 1919, Kenney Papers, file 168.7103-2 HRA.

the safety of American citizens and their property in El Paso.<sup>4</sup> Although this engagement turned out to be the last major battle for Villa's army, the Mexican government was able to establish only very tenuous control over the region, which meant that bands of Mexican raiders continued to cross the border, necessitating the continued presence of American forces.<sup>5</sup>

The War Department ordered Army Air Service units to Texas in June 1919 to support cavalry operations against these roving bands. The first aircraft arrived at Fort Bliss on June 15 (about the time the battle took place in El Paso) and the first air patrol was flown on June 19.<sup>6</sup> As part of this buildup Kenney was ordered to Kelly Field near San Antonio, Texas, and then, in October 1919 to McAllen, Texas, where he became the commander of the 8th Aero Squadron.<sup>7</sup>

Kenney's observation aircraft in the 8th squadron assisted cavalry units in patrolling the southern part of the border between Mexico and Texas against incursions by bandits who stole cattle, horses, and other supplies from ranches. Observation aircraft were sent aloft to patrol a specific area and if the crew of the DH-4 aircraft located a suspected groups of thieves they would relay the information to a cavalry

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<sup>4</sup> Clarence C. Clendenen, Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), pp. 341-356; Maurer Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, 1919-1939 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987), pp. 100-101.

<sup>5</sup> Clendenen, p. 356.

<sup>6</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 100-103; Stacey C. Hinkle, Wings Over the Border: The Army Air Service Armed Patrol of the United States-Mexico Border 1919-1921, Southwestern Studies Number 26 (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1970), pp. 3-10.

<sup>7</sup> Headquarters Southern Department, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Special Order Number 208, August 11, 1919; Headquarters Southern Department, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Special Order Number 260, October 10, 1919, Kenney papers, HRA; 201 file.



outpost either by radio, or through written messages dropped to the waiting cavalry troops in white canvas bags with six foot red streamers.<sup>8</sup>

Life for the servicemen along the border was difficult. There was little social life, the living conditions were primitive, and the high temperatures and constantly blowing wind all combined to make the experience miserable.<sup>9</sup> All in all it must have been a challenging experience for the new squadron commander, but it provided him valuable experience in commanding forces and leading men. Kenney had little to say about his experience on the border, except to note that the squadron at McAllen "had no discipline,"<sup>10</sup> and that the mechanics knew little about caring for the aircraft. These two factors, combined with the unreliable equipment, harsh weather conditions, and primitive landing fields, contributed to the squadron's loss of twenty-two out of twenty-four airplanes in a year of service on the border--a record any commander would certainly want to forget.<sup>11</sup> In July 1920, after only nine months in command, Kenney left the squadron for new duties.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1920 Kenney received his regular commission, an important step in his army career. Like other officers who entered the army during the war, Kenney had been commissioned a reserve officer. Congress, through the National

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<sup>8</sup> Hinkle, pp. 11-39; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 100-107.

<sup>9</sup> Hinkle, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 28-30; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, p. 23; idem, Air Service in World War I, p. 507.

<sup>12</sup> Headquarters Southern Department, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Special Order Number 167, July 17, 1920, Kenney papers, HRA.

Defense Act of 1920, decreed that all officers without a regular commission had to be discharged from the service by the end of December 1920. Those reserve officers who hoped to stay in the service had to obtain a regular commission in the Army by taking an examination and being interviewed by a board of officers. The examinations were apparently quite rigorous and covered areas that most officers had not studied in a number of years, including history, geography, algebra, and science. Fear of these tests led to hours of extensive remedial instruction in many squadrons.<sup>13</sup> Kenney appeared before his examining board at Camp Travis, Texas, on July 7, 1920, earning his regular commission as a Captain with no apparent difficulty.<sup>14</sup>

The National Defense Act of 1920 also officially separated aviation personnel from the Signal Corps and made the Air Service a separate combat branch of the army. Airmen, led by Brigadier General Billy Mitchell who had gained notice for his work in France, had hoped that the United States would form a separate and independent air arm after the war. Mitchell argued that neither the Army nor the Navy understood the capabilities inherent in the air weapon and that the only way to exploit those advantages was through an independent air force. He could not, however, convince Congress of the need for a separate service.<sup>15</sup> While ground force generals reacted sharply to Mitchell's ideas, so did navy admirals who grew irritated with his claims that aircraft had made battleships obsolete. His arguments were especially divisive in the early

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<sup>13</sup> Hinkle, pp. 52-53; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> 14th Cavalry Headquarters, Fort Ringgold, Texas, Special Order Number 146, July 2, 1920, Kenney papers, HRA.

<sup>15</sup> Futrell, pp. 34-35; Hurley, pp. 39-50.

1920s because American public opinion favored a reduction in spending of the armed forces and a defensive foreign policy. If Mitchell proved that aircraft were capable of defending the coastline, there would be an increase in the size and budget of the Air Service and a concomitant decrease in the Navy's share of the national budget--a prospect sure to raise the hackles of every naval officer worth his salt. Mitchell took his campaign public and began agitating for a bombing test against ships. In June and July 1921 Mitchell got a chance to prove his point in a series of trials which climaxed in the sinking of the captured German battleship Ostfriesland. The navy protested that Mitchell had violated the ground rules for the test and the results were not conclusive. No matter. In the mind of the public Mitchell had proved his point.<sup>16</sup> While Kenney took no direct part in any of these activities, he undoubtedly knew they were occurring. More importantly, the tensions between ground, naval, and air officers over how air power should be used and inter-service rivalries were important components of Kenney's experiences between the wars.

In the summer of 1920, however, Kenney was more preoccupied with changes in his personal life. During his tour in Texas, he met Hazel Richardson, a nurse originally from Mobile, Alabama. The two met in a hospital where Kenney was recuperating from a flying mishap. They were married in Mobile, perhaps on route to Kenney's next assignment at Camp Knox, Kentucky, where he was in charge of an aviation detachment charged with developing new procedures for adjusting artillery fire from aircraft. After a brief stay in Kentucky, the newlyweds were ordered to Dayton,

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<sup>16</sup> Hurley, pp. 56-70.

Ohio, where Kenney would attend the Air Service Engineering School and began a new phase in his career.<sup>17</sup>

### Technical Education

The Air Service Engineering School was established to give officers a specialized education in the science of aviation in the hope of improving air operations. The school, which opened its doors to six students in 1919, was located at McCook Field near Dayton, Ohio.<sup>18</sup> Kenney entered the school in November 1920 and found it was "a hell of a stiff course." The work, he recalled, picked "up where I left off at MIT."<sup>19</sup> The course covered a wide range of subjects and prepared air officers for duty in acquiring and evaluating the technical requirements of aircraft. The school included courses ranging from mechanics and theoretical aeronautics to business administration and everything in between.<sup>20</sup> It was obvious that Kenney had not forgotten much from his work at MIT--he graduated first in his class at the Engineering School.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Headquarters Southern Department, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Special Order Number 167, July 17, 1920; War Department, Special Order Number 237, October 8, 1920, Kenney papers, HRA file 168.7103-2; Kenney, "Biographical Sketch;" James Kenney, phone interview with Thomas Griffith, January 10, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Powers, "Founding of the Air Force Institute of Technology," Air University Review 15 (September-October 1964): 36-49; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 65-66. The school was originally known as the Air School of Application, the name was changed in 1920 to the Air Service Engineering School.

<sup>19</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 31.

After leaving the school in July 1921, Kenney began a series of assignments that continued his technical education. He went to Garden City, Long Island, where he was the air service representative and responsible for the acceptance of fifty NBS-1 bombers being built by the Curtiss aircraft company.<sup>22</sup> This aircraft, originally designed as the Martin MB-2, was the primary bomber of the Air Service in the early 1920s. Its two Liberty engines could carry a crew of four at top speed of 99 mph at a maximum height of 10,000 feet.<sup>23</sup> As the government representative at the factory, Kenney inspected and test flew the new aircraft before they were sent to the flying units. This stint in New York gave him an opportunity to see first-hand the problems and challenges involved in producing large-numbers of aircraft.

Kenney's time in Long Island was also marked by personal tragedy and transition. His wife, Hazel, died in September 1922 shortly after giving birth to a son, William Richardson Kenney. Hazel had previously been pregnant with twins, but had suffered a miscarriage and the doctors had warned her about the risks of another pregnancy. She was, however, determined to have a baby, "if I die having this baby, it will be worth it" she told her sister.<sup>24</sup> Kenney, devastated by the death of his wife, also faced the problem of caring for an infant son. Kenney prevailed on Alice Maxey,

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<sup>22</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 31; "Summary of Activities, p.1;" "Biographical Sketch, p. 1."

<sup>23</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 81-82. In order to preserve the nascent aircraft industrial base developed during the war the Air Service divided orders for the bombers among different manufacturers, as a result Curtiss was allowed to build an aircraft designed by Martin.

<sup>24</sup> Letter, James Kenney to Thomas Griffith, February 26, 1994; James Kenney, phone interview with Thomas Griffith, January 10, 1996.

a nurse and neighbor on Long Island, for help in caring for the baby. The two were married on June 5, 1923, in her hometown of Gardner, Maine, just prior to his return to Dayton, Ohio.<sup>25</sup>

Upon Kenney's return to the Air Service Engineering Division he was assigned to several different offices. Some of his duties involved establishing quality control criteria for aircraft and determining delivery schedules for future aircraft, but Kenney also increased his expertise in aircraft design and modification. His most significant enterprise involved moving the machine guns from near the nose of the aircraft (where they had been in World War I) to the wings. Such a move would increase the number of forward-firing guns, but required an increase in the strength of the wings. Kenney's experiment was successful, but the shift towards wing-mounted guns would not be completed until World War II.<sup>26</sup>

### **Military Education**

In the spring of 1925, Kenney was sent to the Air Service Tactical School at Langley Field, Virginia, an assignment which marked the beginning of new phase in his career. While he had previously focus almost exclusively on the technical aspects of aviation, he would now concentrate on the application of air power in war.<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. E. C. Hoagland, phone interview with Thomas Griffith, February 2, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> War Department Special Order Number 115, May 16, 1923, Kenney papers HRA; "Biographical Sketch," p. 2; "Summary of Activities," p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> War Department Special Order Number 115, May 15, 1925 and War Department Special Order Number 158, July 7, 1925, Kenney Papers HRA.

Army education system of the late 1920s consisted of three tiers: the branch schools, such as the Air Service Tactical School which taught officers the tactics and use of forces in one particular arm of the service; the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where the young officer was exposed to military operations at the division level combining all the branches of the army in ground warfare, a slightly broader study of warfare; and the Army War College in Washington, D.C., an institution that trained field grade officers in strategy, policy, and theater-level operations for the highest levels of command. Since the Army education system focused on preparing officers for anticipated tasks in a future war, students were given combat situations that would, hopefully, approximate what they could expect in coming conflicts. As a result, the scenarios were actually two or three levels above the officer's current rank and position.<sup>28</sup>

In 1919, the Director of the Air Service proposed that an Air Service School of Application be established. The purpose of the school would be to teach air officers about their duties and responsibilities, investigate the problems of high-level air commanders, and prepare the students for the next level of military education, the Command and General Staff School.<sup>29</sup> In February 1920 the War Department approved the establishment of the Air Service Field Officer's School, subsequently

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<sup>28</sup> John W. Masland and Laurence I. Radway, Soldiers and Scholars: Military Education and National Policy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> Robert T. Finney, History of the Air Corps Tactical School, USAF Historical Study 100 (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University, 1955; reprinted, Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1992), pp. 8-9, 16; Robert T. Finney, "Early Air Corps Training and Tactics," Military Affairs 20 (Fall 1956): 154-161.

renamed in 1922 the Air Service Tactical School.<sup>30</sup> While the curriculum stressed the tactics of the various classes of aircraft (observation, pursuit, bombardment, and attack) the students were also introduced to combat tactics of the army and navy and the supply and operations planning necessary for preparing combat orders. Most of the material was first presented through lectures, after which the student was given a problem which gave them the opportunity to apply what they had learned.<sup>31</sup>

After graduating from the Tactical School, Kenney went to the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>32</sup> At this school officers broadened their perspective of warfare and learned how to integrate the various ground combat forces (infantry, artillery, and cavalry) into a coherent whole, much as they would if they were a division or corps commander or a staff officer for one of these commanders.<sup>33</sup> As at the Tactical School, the faculty at the Command and General Staff School presented students with material through a lecture, and then asked them to apply what they had learned through map problems and exercises. Drafting actual combat orders and logistical plans reinforced the techniques presented to the officers in

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<sup>30</sup> Finney, History, pp. 9; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 64-65.

<sup>31</sup> Finney, History, pp. 11-14. My thanks to Peter Faber for adding additional insight to the Tactical School.

<sup>32</sup> War Department Special Order Number 83, April 8, 1926, Kenney papers, HRA.

<sup>33</sup> Boyd L. Dastrup, The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College: A Centennial History (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982), pp. 63-65; Timothy K. Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1920-1940," The Journal of Military History 58 (April 1994): 201-203.



lectures and provided additional emphasis on the problems involved in maneuvering and sustaining large combat units.<sup>34</sup>

Although attendance at the Command and General Staff School was important if an officer wanted to be promoted, airmen were harshly critical of the school's treatment of aviation. The curriculum focused on how aviation could help the division or corps commander, and stressed how aircraft were used in observation, long range reconnaissance, and artillery spotting during World War I.<sup>35</sup> While there was some instruction on the benefits of using aircraft to gain control of the air or attack enemy forces, students received little teaching on the independent use of aircraft in strategic bombing.<sup>36</sup> Even in the situations where aircraft might be used closely with ground forces, there was no serious attempt to develop and introduce procedures or ideas for integrating air and ground forces; presumably those would have to be worked out under combat conditions.<sup>37</sup>

During Kenney's year at the Command and General Staff School only 2 of the 97 lectures and 16 of the 303 classroom problem sessions touched on the air service.<sup>38</sup> There was just one class devoted to the use of aircraft in supporting a ground attack,

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<sup>34</sup> The Command and General Staff School, "Schedule for 1926-1927," p. 3, Archives, Combined Arms Research Library, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; Dastrup, pp. 75-76; Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," pp. 201-203.

<sup>35</sup> Dastrup, pp. 70-74; Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," pp. 222-224.

<sup>36</sup> Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," p. 222.

<sup>37</sup> D. K. R. Croswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 57; Dastrup, p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> The Command and General Staff School, "1926-1927 Schedule," passim. The classroom periods were called conferences.

compared to three on "Attack and Defense of a River Line," three on historical research about the attack on Fort Donelson in the Civil War, and four on "Division Technical and Administrative Staff."<sup>39</sup> In addition to the slight coverage given to aviation, the airmen also found themselves outnumbered, Kenney's class contained 204 officers, just nine of them from the Air Corps.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the lack of attention to air matters played a role in Kenney's poor performance at the school--he graduated in the bottom quarter of his class, 174 out of 201, with an 82 percent average.<sup>41</sup>

The irrelevance of the material at the school was a constant bone of contention among the aviators and contributed to their critical attitudes toward service education.<sup>42</sup> Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, who would be the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces in World War II, attended the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth the year after Kenney. According to his biographer, Arnold "was appalled to find the school ignoring the possible uses of the airplane."<sup>43</sup> He was so anxious to leave the school that his wife and family were waiting in the packed car as

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-10.

<sup>40</sup> The Command and General Staff School, Class Roster, 1926-1927. Even as a percentage this was less than their strength in the army. In 1927 aviation personnel comprised only 7.5 percent of the army, whereas the airmen were only slightly over 4 percent of the students in the Command and General Staff School that same year, Office of Statistical Control, Headquarters Army Air Forces, Army Air Forces Statistical Digest, December 1945, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Letter, Elaine McConnell, Archives, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College to author, August 30, 1995, in authors possession.

<sup>42</sup> Historian Timothy Nenninger maintains that "Generally, Leavenworth had a most favorable reputation among U.S. Army officer who served during the interwar era," "Leavenworth and Its Critics," p. 203. While that may have been true for the ground officers, airmen were uniformly more negative about their educational experiences.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas M. Coffey, Hap: The Story of the U. S. Air Force and the Man Who Built It General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), p. 133.

Arnold attended the graduation ceremony. His wife told an inquiring officer that Hap "wanted to get out of this goddamned place just as fast as possible."<sup>44</sup> Carl Spaatz, 8th Air Force commander during World War II and the first Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, avoided going to the school for as long as possible. When he did attend the Command and General Staff School, Spaatz graduated next to last in his class and the Faculty Board rated him very poorly on his efficiency report. As his biographer notes, these "comments did not seem to hurt Spaatz with the Air Corps establishment--they may, in fact, have helped."<sup>45</sup> Another historian remarks: "The school had little influence on [Spaatz] and he apparently learned almost nothing of value there."<sup>46</sup> Donald Wilson, who served as Kenney's chief of staff during the war, only went because it was necessary for promotion and he wanted a break from his current duties. He found the course "devoid of serious recognition of the airplane as an instrument of war" even in operations with the ground forces.<sup>47</sup> One airman wrote, "I wonder just how much difference it would make to me where Lt. X puts his machine gun squad when I am flying over his sector at 25,000 feet."<sup>48</sup> Another officer recalled: "I didn't learn much there that was of any help to me later."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>45</sup> David R. Mets, Master of Airpower (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 98-99, quote on p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> Richard G. Davis, Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe, (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, pp. 147-149, quote on p. 234.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Copp, Few Great Captains, p. 152.

<sup>49</sup> Beverley, p. 43; Craig, pp. 75-76.

Kenney's performance may have reflected this common view of the airmen towards both the school and the army. Given Kenney's personality he likely locked horns with the instructors at the school over the need for an independent air force, a topic that continued to be an issue of disagreement between air and ground officers. Although the Air Service had attained recognition as a combat arm in 1920, airmen and their supporters hoped for an even more important role for air power. Billy Mitchell had continued his very public pursuit of an independent air force, a crusade which climaxed with, what one historian terms, a "calculated attempt to force a showdown with his superiors."<sup>50</sup> In September 1925, during Kenney's student year at the Tactical School, after two naval aviation mishaps Mitchell released a statement to the press blaming the accidents on "the incompetency, criminal negligence, and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense by the Navy and War Departments."<sup>51</sup> Mitchell's intemperate remarks earned him a court-martial which he used as a forum to convince the American public of the importance of aviation.<sup>52</sup> Mitchell's trial overlapped with an ongoing Congressional investigation into the benefits and drawbacks of an independent air force, a study which resulted in the Air Corps Act of 1926. Although this legislation fell short of the airmen's goal of complete independence, it gave them greater autonomy from the control of the ground forces as signified in the name change from Air Service to Air Corps. In addition, the act authorized a position for an Assistant Secretary of War for Air; required that all

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<sup>50</sup> Hurley, p. 101.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Hurley, p. 101.

<sup>52</sup> Hurley, pp. 101-109.

flying units be commanded by a flying officer; and approved a five year expansion in the size of the Air Corps.<sup>53</sup>

Kenney's grades may also have been affected by another problems. His second child, Julia, was born on June 14, 1926, just prior to the beginning of his year at Leavenworth.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the combination of a four-year old and newborn affected his study habits. Kenney was also involved in a violation of one of the strictest rules on the army post--a ban on alcohol. The commandant of the school, Brigadier General Edward L. King, who had been a judge on the court-martial of Billy Mitchell, was remembered as an officer who did not think much of aviators and a strict disciplinarian. One student officer remembered that King "even had a regulation that said children were to be kept quiet and off the streets after six o'clock every evening."<sup>55</sup> King believed in strictly enforcing the national law against the consumption of alcohol then in effect and no alcohol was allowed on Fort Leavenworth. One night Kenney was stopped on post and six bottles of liquor were confiscated from his car. Although he was probably not the only officer breaking the Prohibition Law, the infraction could have doomed his career. The next morning, in accordance with army regulations, Kenney reported to Major Robert Eichelberger, the

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<sup>53</sup> Greer, p. 29, Futrell, pp. 44-51.

<sup>54</sup> E. C. Hoagland, phone interview with Thomas Griffith, February 2, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Robert L. Eichelberger with Milton MacKaye, Our Jungle Road to Tokyo (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. xv; Coffey, p. 132.

post adjutant. To Kenney's relief, and no doubt eternal gratitude, Eichelberger, for reasons that remain unexplained, threw away the summons.<sup>56</sup>

After his year at the Command and General Staff School, Kenney returned to Langley Field, Virginia, to be an instructor at the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS).<sup>57</sup> During his four-year assignment on the faculty institutional ideas about the employment of air power began to change. Prior to this period concepts about the use of aircraft stemmed largely from the experiences of the First World War and focused on how to support ground forces. While Kenney was at the school, faculty members began thinking seriously about using masses of aircraft independently in strategic missions against a wide variety of targets, including the enemy's capital and industrial centers, the enemy air force, lines of communication, and rear supply areas in order to achieve victory in the war without defeating the enemy armies on the ground.<sup>58</sup> Although these ideas were being debated during Kenney's years at ACTS, he was not involved in their development. Instead, he specialized in the area then called attack aviation which had developed as a special air mission near the end of World War I when German and British airmen began attacking targets close to the front lines.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the short duration of the United States involvement in the war, even the American Air Service had become interested in attack aviation, but exactly how and

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<sup>56</sup> Eichelberger, p. xv; James, Time, p. 194.

<sup>57</sup> War Department Special Order Number 75, March 31, 1927, Kenney Papers, HRA.

<sup>58</sup> Finney, History, pp. 62-68.

<sup>59</sup> Richard P. Hallion, Strike From the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1911-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp. 19-28.

when such attacks should be undertaken was still being thrashed out when the war ended in 1918.<sup>60</sup> The British, for example, distinguished between two types of attack missions: trench strafing, attacks on the most forward enemy troops; and ground strafing, attacks a short distance behind the front lines.<sup>61</sup> What was clear, at least at the Tactical School, was the kind of aircraft that had to be designed for these missions and the general profile of such attacks. Ideally, the aircraft would be fast and maneuverable, be equipped with both forward- and rear-firing guns, and carry (relatively) large numbers of bombs. For example, the primary attack aircraft in the Air Corps when Kenney was at the Tactical School was the Curtiss A-3, a two-seat biplane, equipped with four forward- and two rear-firing machine guns, capable of flying at 140 mph and carrying 200 pounds of bombs.<sup>62</sup> Airmen envisioned attack aircraft approaching the target at low altitude and the crew using the machine guns to destroy ground targets and reduce the fire from the enemy gunners while simultaneously dropping small bombs.<sup>63</sup> Since the aircraft would fly most of its missions at low altitude and in close proximity to enemy ground forces the aircraft also had to be built with some kind of protection against enemy anti-aircraft guns.

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<sup>60</sup> United States Army Training Regulation 440-15, Air Tactics, October 15, 1935, pp. 11-13; Thomas H. Greer, The Development of Air Doctrine in the Army Air Arm, 1917-1941, USAF Historical Study Number 89 (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 1955), p. 12; Lee Kennett, "Developments to 1939," in Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support, ed. Benjamin Franklin Cooling (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1990), p. 43.

<sup>61</sup> Hallion, p. 20. The British also used the terms "trench flights" and "battlefield bombing" for these missions. Kennett, First Air War, pp. 211, 221-222.

<sup>62</sup> Air Service Tactical School, "Attack Aviation, 1925-1926," pp. 9-11, file 248.101-10 HRA; Hallion, pp. 21, 46-47.

<sup>63</sup> "Attack Aviation, 1925-1926," pp. 1, 9-13; George C. Kenney, "Conference on Attack Aviation," March 1930, file 248.2201B-1 HRA.

The kinds of targets these attack aircraft would strike was continually under discussion and often debated. Should the aircraft be used primarily in direct support of the ground advances and directed at the opposing front line forces or at targets further removed? During Kenney's time at the Tactical School the emphasis was clearly on the latter.<sup>64</sup> He essentially believed that the ground forces should be able to defeat the opposing enemy forces facing them while attack aircraft were used against reinforcements. These attacks forced the enemy to take defensive precautions while marching or restricted their movements to the hours of darkness when they could not be attacked from the air. Kenney conceded that these attacks might not be overly successful in killing large numbers of enemy soldiers, but that was not an accurate measure of whether the attacks were successful. The value of the attacks could not be judged by simply counting "the number of casualties inflicted by airplanes on the ground force."<sup>65</sup> Instead, commanders should assess the effectiveness of the air attacks on their ability to stop the enemy from "arriving on the battlefield in time to influence the action."<sup>66</sup> Kenney was helping pioneer the use of aviation in what would later to be labeled "interdiction." Although enemy troops, truck columns, antiaircraft guns, and rear supply areas were considered lucrative targets for attack aviation, airmen at the Tactical School, at least during Kenney's tenure, also considered the destruction of

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<sup>64</sup> For earlier thinking see Hallion, pp. 51-54; Kennett, "Developments," pp. 45-47. From at least 1925 the attack aviation teaching at the Tactical School focused on targets behind the front lines. "Attack Aviation, 1925-1926;" Frank M. Andrews, "Is Attack Aviation Necessary or Justified?" May 15, 1928, ACTS Thesis, Langley Field, Virginia, file 248.222-55D HRA; Kenney, "Conference."

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Kenney to Lt. Col. H. A. Wells, Fort Benning, Georgia, Subject: Comments on test of infantry weapons against aircraft, April 18, 1930 file 248.2201 HRA.



aircraft on the ground important for gaining control of the air, a prerequisite for successful attack missions.<sup>67</sup>

Kenney put his journalism experience at MIT to good use writing the textbooks on attack aviation. By comparison to the early books, Kenney's products were better written and contained an added twenty pages that analyzed the use of attack aviation. The textbook produced during Kenney's final year at the school discussed the evolution of attack aviation in Europe by the French, Germans and British during World War I. In addition, there were several pages that touched on air operations after the First World War including Royal Air Force (RAF) experiences in the Middle East and Russia and the work done by the United States Marine Corps in Nicaragua.<sup>68</sup> In addition to teaching about attack aviation, Kenney was also a member of the attack board, a group of officers charged with determining the requirements for new attack aircraft, equipment, and munitions.<sup>69</sup> In later years Kenney remembered his work quite proudly: "I was the papa of attack aviation," he recalled. "I wrote the textbooks

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Kenney, "Conference;" Air Corps Tactical School, "Attack Aviation," March 1930, file 248.2201B HRA; Major Frank D. Lackland, memorandum to Assistant Commandant Air Corps Tactical School, May 8, 1929, pp. 5, 8, 13. This paper was written in response to Kenney's question: "What is the best method of operation for attack aviation against ground targets in a (sic) warfare against a well organized enemy?" file 248.222-10F HRA.

<sup>68</sup> Comparison of "Attack Aviation, 1925-1926" and "Attack Aviation" 1930, pp. 1-21, also see Kenney, "Conference" for historical examples.

<sup>69</sup> Letter, Commandant Air Corps Tactical School to Chief of the Air Corps, Subject: Appointment of Instructors of the Tactical School as members of Boards to recommend types of aircraft, October 25, 1929; "Proceedings of a Board of Officers for the Purpose of determining the General Requirements for an Attack airplane," Langley Field, Virginia, April 8, 1929, file 248.122 HRA.

on it, taught it, and developed the tactics."<sup>70</sup> While there is no doubt that Kenney's work at the Tactical School was important, he did later overstate his own influence. There were other officers in the Air Corps developing tactics for attack aviation, especially those flying with the 3rd Attack Group, and the examples he used in his teaching point out that many different countries used this class of aviation.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, Kenney was truthful in his claim about writing the textbooks and can rightly be considered the one responsible for synthesizing and analyzing the different historical experiences of attack aviation.

Kenney's teachings were not a critical study of the problems of attack aviation, but a template provided to young officers on how to conduct attack operations. The lack of any close scrutiny of his writing hid the weaknesses in his emphasis on flying at low altitude as a way to avoid detection and attack from enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft guns.<sup>72</sup> While attacking targets from low altitude did make it more difficult for enemy fighters to find and then shoot down the attackers, these tactics offered no protection from anti-aircraft fire, particularly small arms. In fact, low altitude attacks made aircraft extremely vulnerable to losses from enemy gunfire, a fact borne out in some of the experiences on the western front in World War I. At the battle of Cambrai in

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<sup>70</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 35; Kenney, interview with Stanley, pp. 6-7. In the school roster Kenney is the only instructor listed for attack aviation and observation. Roster, Air Corps Tactical School, 1928-1929, HRA file 248.12610. Prior to the 1934-1935 annual report there was no breakdown of instructors by section or subject area. Air Corps Tactical School, "Staff and Faculty Air Corps Tactical School, 1920-1934," HRA file 248.1751; Finney, History, p. 99.

<sup>71</sup> Kennett, pp. 45-49.

<sup>72</sup> "Attack Aviation," 1930, pp. 22-24; Lackland memorandum, pp. 6-7.

1917, for instance, the British lost 35 percent of the attack aircraft sent out on the first day.<sup>73</sup> Though Kenney did not appreciate the threat, some in the Air Corps did and reacted, in part, by exploring ways to increase the accuracy of high-altitude missions.<sup>74</sup> The lethality of the low-altitude environment also played a role in the decision of the Air Corps to move away from the low-altitude attack aircraft to the so-called medium and light bombers. These bombers were bigger than the contemporary attack aircraft, could fly longer distances at higher altitudes, and delivered more bombs. In addition, the light and medium bombers were seen as a more of a multi-purpose weapon than attack aircraft. By the end of the 1930s attack aviation in the Air Corps had been transformed into light bombardment.<sup>75</sup> The experiences in World War II would confirm the deadly effectiveness of ground fire on aircraft, especially when flying at low altitude. Perhaps fortuitously, when Kenney went to war in the Southwest Pacific, he faced an enemy that had neglected anti-aircraft weapons. As a result, he was able to employ low-altitude attack methods throughout the war, and losses from ground fire in the Southwest Pacific would not be as problematic as in other theaters during the war.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Morrow, p. 237.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen L. McFarland, America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 84-85.

<sup>75</sup> Gary C. Cox, "Beyond the Battle Line: US Air Attack Theory and Doctrine, 1919-1941," Thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 1995, pp. 44-48; Hallion, pp. 48-49; Kennett, "Developments," 51-52.

<sup>76</sup> Anti-aircraft fire accounted for almost half of the losses on combat missions in the European theater (5,380 out of 11,687), but only 22 percent (546 out of 2,494) in Kenney's area. Army Air Forces Statistical Digest, pp. 255, 258; Kenneth P. Werrell, Archie, Flak, AAA, and SAM: A Short Operational History of Ground-Based Air Defense (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 1988), pp. 53-59.

One innovative idea of Kenney's developed at ACTS would prove very successful in the war. Part of Kenney's reasoning in advocating low altitude attacks was that, given the primitive aiming systems of the aircraft, such strikes were more accurate than those from a higher altitude. Bombing from low altitude, however, posed several problems. The first was the time necessary for the bombs to arm after they left the aircraft. To ensure that bombs did not explode while they were on the aircraft, or immediately after they were released, a delay, usually measured in tenths of seconds, was built into the arming mechanism. If dropped from too low an altitude, the bombs would not fall long enough to arm and, consequently, would not explode. If the bombs did arm, a low altitude delivery could result in damage to the bombing aircraft due to the fragments from the explosion. Depending on the size of the bomb, these fragments (called the "frag" pattern) could go out to a distance of several thousand feet. Allowing the aircraft to get a safe distance away from the area before the bomb exploded eliminated the danger to the aircraft.<sup>77</sup> One way to solve these problems was through improved fuses. In the late 1920s, however, a suitable delayed-action fuze had not been developed.<sup>78</sup>

Still another difficulty in low altitude bombing was the amount of damage caused by the small, light bombs envisioned for the attack aircraft. The bombs exploded when they hit the ground which attenuated much of their blast and diminished their effectiveness. What was needed was a method for exploding the bombs above the

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<sup>77</sup> "Attack Aviation, 1925-1925," pp. 12-13; "Attack Aviation," 1930, pp. 34-35.

<sup>78</sup> Lackland Memorandum, p. 3; "Attack Aviation, 1925-1926," p. 13; McFarland, pp. 84-85.

ground so that their projectiles would travel further.<sup>79</sup> In an effort to solve some, or all, of these problems Kenney installed a parachute in the tail of the bomb which would deploy after released from the aircraft. The parachute slowed the fall for the bomb, providing enough time for the bomb to arm, while allowing the aircraft to escape the area prior to detonation and exploding the bomb before it hit the ground.<sup>80</sup> Bombs using this concept, known as "high drag" bombs, remain in use today.

Kenney's assignment at the Air Corps Tactical School strengthened his reputation in the service. In November 1930, Davenport Johnson, commander of the 3rd Attack Group, wrote several letters to Major Frank Andrews, serving in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, requesting Kenney for his group. Johnson was in need of a "good" group operations officer (second in command) and thought that Kenney would be the best officer for the position. Both of these men had known Kenney at the Tactical School; Johnson was an instructor with Kenney in 1927, and Andrews was a student in the class of 1928. Andrews agreed with Johnson and thought Kenney would be an excellent choice for the position. Not everyone, however, was as impressed with Kenney at the Tactical School. A fellow instructor later reflected that Kenney had a reputation as a "renowned . . . ad-lib artist and indefatigable talker on any subject."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Major L. S. Fraser, Captain George C. Kenney, Captain George H. Weems, "Report on bombing and machine gun firing conducted by the Air Corps Tactical School, April 13, 17, and 23, 1931, against targets representing a small infantry column," [May 1931], file 248.2201B HRA.

<sup>80</sup> Kenney, interview with Stanley, p. 9; "Summary of Activities," p. 2. In another interview Kenney said he developed the bomb several years after leaving the Tactical School. Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 72-75. In his memoirs he states that he came up with the idea in 1928, but the bombs were not tested until 1936, Kenney, Reports, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, p. 144, details on his career are throughout the book.

In the end Kenney did not get the assignment to Johnson's group because Kenney was supposed to attend the Army War College.<sup>82</sup>

Attendance at the Army War College was the capstone school for Army officers. The classes contained about one hundred officers, ninety from the Army and the remaining ten from the Navy or Marine Corps, and prepared them for the highest commands in wartime and for duty on the general staff of the War Department.<sup>83</sup> Army officers selected for the school had outstanding performance evaluations, were graduates of the Command and General Staff School, and had been rated by that school as eligible for a general staff position.<sup>84</sup> In theory these officers were among the best in the service. The ten month course at the war college was divided into two phases. The first, entitled "Preparation for War," lasted from September until April and exposed the officer to the various divisions of the general staff (Personnel, Intelligence, Operations and Logistics--abbreviated as G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4 respectively), teach officers the capabilities of potential enemies, and understand the process for developing war plans. In the second phase, "The Conduct of War," students applied and refined their knowledge through a variety of methods including map exercises, a command post

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<sup>82</sup> Letters, Frank Andrews to Davenport Johnson, November 11, 1930 (reply to first request); Johnson to Andrews, November 17, 1930; Andrews to Johnson, November 22, 1930, Frank M. Andrews Papers, Library of Congress; Finney, History, p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> Harry P. Ball, Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: The Alumni Association of the United States Army War College, 1983), pp. 211-212; Croswell, p. 63; Oswald H. Saunders, "The Army War College," The Military Engineer 26 (March-April 1934), p. 102

<sup>84</sup> Ball, pp. 250-253; Croswell, p. 63.

exercise, and, if possible, a battlefield tour.<sup>85</sup> In addition to numerous lectures throughout the year, students also completed small group analytic studies and an individual paper.<sup>86</sup>

Most of the work in the school was done as part of a committee of ten to fifteen officers who were given a problem to consider. After researching the question, the committee arrived at a consensus opinion and spokesman gave an oral presentation of the group's findings, along with a written report, to the faculty and class.<sup>87</sup> Although this style of learning broadened the officer's perspective and introduced him to the problems of working with other staff officers, the constant rearranging of committees caused frustration among students and, as in any group setting, the solution presented was often not the best choice, but rather the best compromise. Despite these drawbacks, one historian maintains that the value of the system was in the informal evaluations each student made of the other: assessments of intellectual strengths and weaknesses "that could be relied upon during the mobilizations and wars to come."<sup>88</sup>

Kenney entered the War College in September 1932 with a class of 87 students. Among them four Air Corps officers and a man who was Kenney's friend and fast becoming his mentor: Major Frank Andrews. The air officers were used to being a

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<sup>85</sup> Colonel Leon B. Dromer, Assistant Commandant, Army War College, "General Orientation, the Army War College Course, 1932-1933," pp. 2-3, File 390-1, Miscellaneous no. 1 1932-1933, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI; Ball, pp. 212-214.

<sup>86</sup> Ball, 227-230.

<sup>87</sup> Dromer, pp. 4-6; Saunders, p. 103.

<sup>88</sup> Ball, p. 248.

minority in the army, but were sorely underrepresented at the War College--their number at the school was less than half of the relative strength of airmen in the service.<sup>89</sup> During the "Preparation for War" phase, Kenney worked on several different committees. His first project compared how the United States, England, France, and Germany planned to employ forces in a future conflict. The report analyzed the principles and methods each country advocated for integrating artillery, cavalry, and infantry in assaulting defensive positions, pursuing the enemy, and in defending a location. Conspicuous by its absence in the report was any reference to how aviation fit into the methods for a future conflict.<sup>90</sup> A shortcoming that might be explained by the small number of airmen in the school or the general attitude in the army towards the importance of air power in warfare. Kenney also worked on reports about needed modifications to the officer personnel system; reviewed the industrial mobilization plan for the United States; and he surveyed the geographical, political, and economic conditions in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile--a report which also included an analysis of the probable actions of these countries in a war against the United States. Prophetically, perhaps, Kenney was also assigned to a group charged with preparing the "Orange Plan"--the code name for the war plan against Japan.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Army War College, "Class of 1933, Resident," Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI; Copp, p. 494, fn. 2. The other Air Corps officers were Charles T. Phillips and David S. Seaton. In 1932 aviation personnel were 11 percent of the army. Army Air Forces Statistical Digest, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> Report of Committee Number 3, Army War College, "Tactical Doctrines," September 26, 1932, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

<sup>91</sup> George C. Kenney Record Card, Army War College; Report of Committee number 8, "Promotion, Separation, and Assignment of Regular Army Officers in Time of Peace: Modifications to Develop Efficient and Well-Balanced Officer Personnel," October 26, 1932; Report of Committee number 2, "War Reserves," November 16, 1932; Report of Committee number 6, "Separate Strategic



Kenney's analytic studies focused on two World War I battles. The first contrasted the march of the German First Army during the invasion of France in 1914 with a contemporary American force to highlight the supply and maneuver problems commanders faced with this size force. The second study, for which Kenney served as the chairman of the committee, was an in-depth operational study of a battle between the German and Russian armies in February of 1915--the Winter, or Second Masurian Lakes, Battle. The report discussed all of the factors that went into the clash of arms: the strategic background; the arrangement of the forces; terrain and weather; the morale and training of the troops; and plans made by the headquarters, in an effort to explain the reasons for the overwhelming tactical victory by the Germans.<sup>92</sup>

At the War College, as in the lower-level Command and General Staff School, the study of air power in warfare was, at best, limited.<sup>93</sup> The one study Kenney participated in on tactical methods did not include any mention of aviation, although during the end of year exercises Kenney's class was able to use aircraft in missions beyond simply attacking and observing front line enemy forces, an option unavailable

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Surveys of the A.B.C.(Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) Countries of South America," December 21, 1932, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

<sup>92</sup> Report of Committee number 3-B, "A Critical Study of the First German Army from August 12 to 24, 1914 and contrast it with a march under like conditions of an American force organized under the present tables of organization and having approximately equal infantry strength to that of the First Germany Army," January 23, 1933; Report of Committee Number 3-B, "Envelopment (The Winter Battle in Masuria, 8th and 10th German Armies, February 7 to 18, 1915)," February 18, 1933, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

<sup>93</sup> Ball, p. 246.

to previous classes. In addition, at least one committee did write a report on the use of aviation with land forces .<sup>94</sup>

In his own individual student paper titled "The Proper Composition of the Air Force," Kenney focused on the use of air power. Kenney's term at the War College occurred during a period in which American foreign policy was based on staying out of the affairs of Europe and primarily concerned with defending the homeland and territories of the United States. In keeping with this national policy, the primary mission of the Air Corps was the defense of the United States, in particular conducting attacks against enemy invasion fleets.<sup>95</sup> In his paper Kenney maintained that the first step in accomplishing this mission was to gain "freedom of action in the air" while denying this freedom to a hostile air force.<sup>96</sup> At the same time aircraft would be used to locate and attack the hostile fleet, landing parties, troop and supply concentrations, and the enemy lines of communication while simultaneously defending against enemy air attacks. Kenney concluded, after analyzing the types of aircraft and the air organization currently possessed by the United States, that the Air Corps of the United States in 1933 could not perform its mission. According to his calculations, the United States needed over 1100 combat aircraft to accomplish the assigned mission, but in

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<sup>94</sup> Finney, History, pp. 22-23, 33-34; Captain George C. Kenney, "The Proper Composition of the Air Force," Memorandum for the Assistant Commandant, The Army War College, April 29, 1933, file 248.211-62K HRA, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 380-382, 402-404.

<sup>96</sup> Kenney, "The Proper Composition of the Air Force," p. 1.

February 1933 the authorized strength of aircraft assigned for this task was only 621 and the number of aircraft actually assigned to combat units was only half of the authorized strength.<sup>97</sup> He claimed that the observation aircraft were "insufficient, unsuited, and unequipped" to patrol the seas and detect an invasion fleet.<sup>98</sup> Even if this force was sighted the bombers sent against the force were "insufficient in strength," and attack aircraft, used against the ground forces once they made it to shore, were "deficient in equipment and strength."<sup>99</sup> In short, the Air Corps could not succeed in its then current state.

Kenney's report on the current state of the Air Corps marked his last assignment at the War College and the end of his formal military education. The value of this education was hard to define. Airmen at the time were almost uniformly negative about attending a service school, but these experiences were probably more important and more valuable than the air officers later admitted. For one thing, the airmen's comments imply a relatively narrow definition of utility. If the school did not conform to their ideas of the use of air power, or pay enough attention to the subject, they considered the entire course meaningless. No doubt their knowledge of ground operations, foreign policy, and industrial mobilization would prove useful later in their careers, but at the time they attended the schools it seemed irrelevant, and given the tension between air and ground officers, service education was simply another bone of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 2, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

contention. During Kenney's stint as MacArthur's air commander he was heavily involved in planning for numerous ground operations and his knowledge of army doctrine contributed to his understanding of how air power could be used to affect the outcome of military operations.

An important by-product of the army school environment was the informal connections airmen made with other members of the army. One airman, in an attempt to convince his fellow officers about the importance of attending the Army War College, argued that attendance there could help an officer, "establish his reputation and start those contacts which can go a long way towards making pleasant official relations in his future assignments."<sup>100</sup> Historian D. K. R. Croswell, although generally very critical of the army schools, agrees with this assessment and concludes that these networks "proved to be an important compliment to the traditional chain of command."<sup>101</sup> While these contacts were not always useful, occasionally they did prove valuable. In this regard, Kenney met several ground officers at the various schools with whom he would later cross paths. Robert L. Eichelberger, who would become an important ground commander in the Southwest Pacific, was the officer who tore up Kenney's summons for alcohol at Fort Leavenworth. The chief of staff for MacArthur, Richard K. Sutherland, and the head of operations in MacArthur's

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<sup>100</sup> B.Q. Jones, "The Army War College," Air Corps News Letter Vol. 20, no. 23, December 1, 1937, p. 6, file 168.69 HRA.

<sup>101</sup> Croswell, pp. 65-66.

headquarters, Stephen Chamberlin, were both members of Kenney's War College class and worked with him on separate committee reports.<sup>102</sup>

The common schooling of air and ground officers was important for another reason: the ability to communicate. Despite the shortcomings of the service education, both the Command and General Staff School and the War College gave officers the ability to "speak the same language."<sup>103</sup> Obviously, the school taught officers more than the appropriate jargon to use in any given situation. Since even common and often-used words can have ambiguous meanings, teaching individuals to "speak the same language" meant providing a common vocabulary of concepts, ideas, metaphors, perspectives, problems, and approaches to issues used in reasoning out solutions. In the military, just as in academic disciplines, business, or other professions, story telling, metaphors and analogies transmit ideas. During wartime, when time is short and officers are under intense pressure, the common background and language was especially important because it allows officers to understand the assumptions, conditions, and compressed arguments behind proposed plans or orders without lengthy explanations.<sup>104</sup> Given Kenney's role with ground forces in World War II, the

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<sup>102</sup> Report of Committee Number 3, "Tactical Doctrines;" Report of Committee Number 8, "Promotion, Separation, and Assignment," Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Timothy Nenninger, "Creating Officers: The Leavenworth Experience, 1920-1940," Military Review 69 (November 1989): 62.

<sup>104</sup> For an example of the importance of a common language in an academic discipline, see Donald N. McCloskey, "Storytelling in Economics," in Christopher Nash, ed., Narrative in Culture: The Uses of Storytelling in the Sciences, Philosophy, and Literature (London: Routledge, 1990). McCloskey writes, "Persuasion of the most rigorous kind has blanks to be filled at every other step, if it is about a difficult murder case, for example, or a difficult mathematical theorem." p. 19, or, I would add, a military operation.

education was undoubtedly invaluable. Not only could he understand the implications of plans proposed by his ground counterparts, but he also could converse with them in their language, making him more effective in his explanations about the use of air power and more able to phrase his thinking and proposals in ways his ground commander and counterparts would find reasonable and persuasive.

If a common language and interactions with ground officers increased Kenney's ability to communicate with them in the war, his education was lacking in connection with naval officers. None of his service education seriously addressed operations between the ground and sea services and his only opportunity to discuss ideas about air-sea operations with naval officers would have come from his year at the Army War College.<sup>105</sup> This lack of contact did little to increase Kenney's understanding of the capabilities and limitations of naval forces, a shortcoming that would be important in his role during World War II.

### **Staff Officer**

After graduating from the War College, Kenney stayed in Washington to work in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, the highest headquarters staff in the Air Corps.<sup>106</sup> In late June 1933, Kenney reported to his new assignment in the Plans Division as an assistant to Major James Chaney. He was also named the Air Corps liaison officer to the War Department Section of the Joint Economy Committee and

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<sup>105</sup> Army War College, "Class of 1933 Resident."

<sup>106</sup> War Department Special Order Number 57, March 11, 1933, Kenney Papers, HRA.

was the Air Corps representative to the Army's Chemical Warfare Technical Committee.<sup>107</sup>

While the life of a staff officer was hardly glamorous (one project he worked on, for example, detailed the length of the runways and facilities at various airfields in the United States), he gained attention within the service during his first year when he helped translate an article by the Italian air theorist Giulio Douhet which the Chief of the Air Corps, Major General Benjamin D. Foulois, disseminated throughout the Air Corps and to influential Congressmen. While the translation from French was done with the help of Dorothy Benedict, Kenney's combination of journalistic experience and aviation background helped to make Douhet's ideas accessible to the rank and file of the Army Air Corps.<sup>108</sup>

One of Kenney's duties in the Plans Division was preparing material sent to Congress about matters involving the Air Corps. In early 1934 he played a key role in preparing legislation for yet another attempt to gain an independent air organization. Although Billy Mitchell had passed from the scene with his court-martial in 1925 and the Air Corps Act of 1926 afforded a measure of institutional independence, many airmen continued to hope for their own service, free from the control of ground or naval officers. While the Army General Staff struggled to keep control of this

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<sup>107</sup> War Department, Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, Personnel Order Number 147, June 27, 1933; Letter, Oscar Westover Assistant Chief of the Air Corps to Kenney, June 27, 1933, Kenney Papers, HRA; 201 file.

<sup>108</sup> Shiner, Foulois, p. 47; Copp, Few Great Captains, p. 106. Wolk, "Innovator," p. 130, dates this project during Kenney's term at the Tactical School, but the timing of the article makes that supposition unlikely. The airfield study can be found in Headquarters Army Air Forces Plans Division, Record Group 18, entry 223, Box 4, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

bureaucratic insurgency, airmen enlisted the support of influential congressmen. One of the most important, and insistent, was Democratic Congressman John J. McSwain of South Carolina, the Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee since February 1932. In January 1934, as he had every year, McSwain proposed hearings on aviation and submitted a bill for an independent air force. At his behest the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps prepared the legislation, but since the Air Corps was still part of the Army, officers had to undertake this project in secret.<sup>109</sup> As in any staff product, there were a number of officers involved in preparing this legislation, although some officers credited Kenney with writing the final proposal.<sup>110</sup>

The members of the Army General Staff stubbornly resisted the legislation and were infuriated by the subterfuge involved in proposing it.<sup>111</sup> Army officers in the War Department, including the Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur, were also irritated because they had recently decided to organize the air units of the Army under a single air commander. MacArthur's reorganization of the ground forces from nine separate corps areas to four field armies under the control of the chief of staff was designed to improve the combat readiness of the army and gave renewed emphasis to consolidating control over the air units. A board of high ranking army officers had approved the concept of a new air organization, called General Headquarters Air Force (or GHQ Air Force) in October 1933, that would be established to increase the combat

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<sup>109</sup> Shiner, Foulois, p. 78-79, 97-98.

<sup>110</sup> Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 151, 282.

<sup>111</sup> Shiner, Foulois, pp. 97-100.



readiness of the Air Corps, but did not make a public announcement until Congressman McSwain proposed his legislation in January 1934, leading some to believe that the army would never have made the move without Congressional pressure.<sup>112</sup>

Despite the relative consensus within the higher levels of the army on the desirability of a centralized air headquarters, implementation of the plan was delayed by other events. On February 9, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt accused the commercial airlines of improprieties in the methods they had used to gain the contracts for air mail service and asked General Foulois and the Air Corps to take over the air mail routes while new contracts were negotiated. With limited time to prepare for the task, inadequate training and equipment for instrument and night flying, and some of the worst winter weather in years, the operation strained the Air Corps beyond its capability and proved a debacle for the Air Corps. The service experienced sixty-six crashes and twelve fatalities and during the operation, yet completed fewer flights than the commercial airlines during comparable periods, and at almost twice the cost.<sup>113</sup> In the aftermath of the episode, President Roosevelt appointed former Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to investigate air mail operations and the general condition of the Air Corps.<sup>114</sup> The Baker Board agreed with the concept of a GHQ Air Force and

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<sup>112</sup> Shiner, Foulois, pp. 84-89; Shiner, John F. Shiner, "Birth of GHQ Air Force, Military Affairs 42 (October 1978): 114-117; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 284-298; Futrell, Ideas, pp. 67-68.

<sup>113</sup> Shiner, Foulois, Chapter 5; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 299-317; Eldon W. Downs, "Army and the Airmail--1934," The Airpower Historian 9 (January 1962):35-51.

<sup>114</sup> Shiner, Foulois, pp. 193-198.

recommended that the army form such a headquarters, but undertake a one year testing period before deciding on the final organizational details.<sup>115</sup>

While the GHQ Air Force was not an independent air force, most airmen considered it an important step in that direction. The GHQ Air Force commander controlled aircraft designated by the Air Corps as "air force" units, that is bombers, fighters, and attack aircraft. Observation squadrons, considered part of the "air service," would still fall directly under the army field commanders during wartime. The GHQ Air Force commander reported directly to the theater commander during war and coordinated air operations that supported the objectives of the entire theater.<sup>116</sup> In order to prepare both the air commander, his staff, and the flying units for war, the GHQ Air Force commander would report directly to the Army chief of staff during peacetime.<sup>117</sup>

Serious planning for GHQ Air Force began in October 1934 when Lieutenant Colonel Frank M. Andrews was transferred from command of the First Pursuit Group to the War Department. In December Andrews was named commander GHQ Air Force, effective March 1, 1935 when the one year test of the organization would begin.<sup>118</sup> As a planning officer in the headquarters of the Air Corps, Kenney was

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<sup>115</sup> Shiner, Foulois, p. 207.

<sup>116</sup> Training Regulation 440-15, "Employment of the Air Forces of the Army," October 15, 1935, Andrews Papers, LOC; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 332-339; Futrell, Robert Frank Futrell, Ideas, Concepts and Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907-1960 (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 1971), pp. 40-41, 73-75.

<sup>117</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 319-325; Shiner, Foulois, pp. 206-207

<sup>118</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 325-327.

deeply involved in developing the organizational framework of the GHQ Air Force and his experiences as a member of the temporary GHQ staff formed during an exercise in the summer of 1934 gave him some insight into how the command should be organized.<sup>119</sup> In January 1935, Kenney was named to a group of officers charged with more detailed planning of the GHQ Air Force and was subsequently selected by Andrews to be the assistant chief of staff for operations and training when the command was officially established.<sup>120</sup> This position was one of the most important on the staff because it focused on the day-to-day combat training for the flying units and would handle the responsibility for executing combat operations in the event of war. Kenney's selection for this position, and elevation to Lieutenant Colonel, Kenney's first promotion in seventeen years, was merited by his professional stature in the Air Corps, the level of service education, and his performance of key duties at the War Department. No doubt Kenney's personal relationship with Andrews, first established at the Tactical School and then strengthened with their association at the Army War College, played a role as well in Andrew's selection of Kenney for his staff.<sup>121</sup>

The GHQ Air Force represented a significant change in the organization and training of air units. Prior to this time the corps area commander had control over the

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<sup>119</sup> "Memo on Conference on GHQ organization," n.d., Andrews Papers, LOC; Headquarters GHQ AF, Special Order Number 1, July 25, 1934, Kenney Papers, HRA.

<sup>120</sup> Adjutant General Orders, AG 210.482, January 21, 1935, Kenney Papers, HRA; War Department Special Order Number 35, February 11, 1935; Headquarters GHQ AF General Order Number 2, March 2, 1935; Andrews papers LOC.

<sup>121</sup> Finney, *History*, pp. 101-103, 118; Army War College, Roster, Class of 1933, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

activities of the flying units. Despite his title, and the fact that his staff wrote the training regulations and operational standards, the Chief of the Air Corps had little actual control over the day-to-day activities of the flying units. Instead, each corps commander determined the procedures and training requirements for the air units under his command. Under the new organizational framework, GHQ Air Force was now responsible for the tactical training and employment of air units, a significant improvement in improving the combat readiness, but authority over these individual units remained divided. The Chief of the Air Corps still had responsibility for the initial training of airmen when they entered the service, determined individual assignments, and purchased the equipment used by the units. The ground commanders retained their authority over the physical structures of the individual flying fields.<sup>122</sup> As a result, the commanders of the flying units had three different bosses to please, each concerned with different problems and expecting different results.

As the officer primarily responsible for operations and training, Kenney stayed busy during the first year of the GHQ Air Force visiting various units to discover the problems they had with equipment, doctrine, and training. As reflected in his title, his duties fell into two different areas: operations and training. Kenney's responsibilities included oversight of day-to-day flying activities in the command, monitoring the number of flying hours for pilots, and preparing training instructions that dictated the missions necessary for flying proficiency.<sup>123</sup> In addition, his division planned the

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<sup>122</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 339-343; Shiner, "Birth of GHQ Air Force," p. 114.

<sup>123</sup> "Preliminary Report of Service Test of GHQ Air Force," Headquarters GHQ Air Force Bulletin number 5, November 2, 1935, pp. 10-14, file 415.171 HRA.

exercises that attempted to simulate anticipated combat scenarios. Since one of the goals of the GHQ Air Force was to improve the mobility of air units, Kenney developed tests which forced units to pack-up their equipment and supplies on short-notice and move to an austere location for operations. In addition, he planned war games that pitted units against each other in order to test combat tactics and planning procedures in an effort to improve the readiness of GHQ Air Force units. At one exercise he employed position reports given by the aircraft to develop a rudimentary air raid warning system that allowed fighters to intercept incoming bombers.<sup>124</sup> While the pace was grueling, the experience was almost certainly beneficial for Kenney. He had been in on the ground floor of the formation of the closest thing to a combat air headquarters in the United States. Along the way he discovered the support facilities, training, and resources units needed to maintain a high level of combat readiness and what type of organization was needed to meld the units together into a coherent combat force.

At the end of an exhausting first year, Kenney remembered being home "something like 39 days,"<sup>125</sup> GHQ Air Force prepared a report for the War Department that spelled out both the accomplishments and areas in need of improvement. Andrews and his staff, in no small way spurred on by the problems identified in the air mail fiasco, had pushed for better instrument flying training in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 14-15; Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 35-36; Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 303, 342-343.

<sup>125</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 36.

order to improve the ability of the Air Corps units to takeoff and hit targets in spite of poor weather. An increase in the number of flying hours per month for each pilot and a "drive" for this type of training, headed by the operations staff under Kenney's direction, jumped the number of qualified instrument pilots from 9 percent of the force to 67 percent in six months.<sup>126</sup> Despite this improvement, the report cited many deficiencies that detracted from the combat readiness of GHQ Air Force, including the need for better navigation training, more precise weather information, and more bombing and gunnery ranges. In addition, there was still a shortage of aircraft and people to accomplish the missions assigned to GHQ Air Force and the mobility of the squadrons needed improvement.<sup>127</sup>

The report also highlighted the fact that individual air units were responsible to three different organizations: GHQ AF for tactical training and combat employment; the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps for individual assignments, promotions, and equipment; and the corps commanders for local regulations and procedures. For example, although Andrews was responsible for the combat employment and training of flying units, he did not have the authority to modify their organizational structure in light of the results of the GHQ Air Force test, nor could he get rid of commanders that he considered incompetent. Thus, although he had the responsibility for preparing a combat-ready force, he did not have the authority to make the changes necessary for this outcome. Not surprisingly, the report written by General Andrews and his GHQ

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<sup>126</sup> "Preliminary Report of Service Test of GHQ Air Force," p. 13; Commanding General GHQ AF, "Report of 1935 Service Test of GHQ AF," February 1, 1936, pp. 11-15, Andrews Papers, LOC.

<sup>127</sup> "Report of 1935 Service Test of GHQ AF," 47-49.

Air Force staff, advocated that the Commander of GHQ Air Force be given more authority over the air units. The Chief of the Air Corps, Major General Oscar Westover, disagreed, arguing that all air units, including GHQ Air Force, should be under his control.<sup>128</sup>

Despite Kenney's close connections with Andrews and the work he had done on the GHQ Air Force staff, his assignment there was short-lived. In July 1936, after barely a year at the headquarters, Kenney was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, as an instructor at the Infantry School. The move was not only banishment from the Air Corps, but also meant a reduction in rank--Kenney reverted from his temporary rank of Lieutenant Colonel back to his permanent rank of Captain.<sup>129</sup>

Kenney's move was the result of two conflicts involving GHQ Air Force: one with the Army General Staff, the other with the Chief of the Air Corps. Kenney placed most of the blame for his transfer on the dispute between the Army General Staff and GHQ Air Force over the new Boeing B-17 bomber. The B-17 was a four-engine, long-range bomber that the Air Corps saw as a superb instrument for coastal defense, their primary mission at the time, and for strategic bombardment against some enemy in a future conflict. Although the Air Corps ordered experimental models of the aircraft, the Army General Staff, and in particular the new Army Chief of Staff General Malin Craig, disagreed with the thinking of the Air Corps and in June 1936 vetoed a request

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<sup>128</sup> Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 339-343; Shiner, Foulois, p. 210; Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 333-339.

<sup>129</sup> War Department, Special Order number 115, May 14, 1936, Kenney papers, HRA; Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 37.

for additional B-17s.<sup>130</sup> Kenney went to the General Staff and explained why it was so important to the Air Corps. One general told Kenney that the range of the B-17 was excessive and "A couple of hundred miles of range was enough to satisfy the interest of any Army commander."<sup>131</sup> Kenney replied in a fashion which "they didn't like . . . because I was a temporary lieutenant colonel and a permanent captain and these were all major generals."<sup>132</sup> It is unclear what remarks got Kenney in hot water, but based on his comment it is likely that it was not just what he said, but how he said it. Kenney's run-in with the General Staff, however, was only one factor in his transfer. He was also caught in the struggle between Westover and Andrews over control of the Air Corps.

In the spring of 1936 Andrews and Westover remained at loggerheads over control of air units. As the service test of GHQ Air Force pointed out, Andrews was responsible for the performance of the units, but had no authority to move people between bases, remove officers who might not be performing adequately, or retain airmen in certain positions. Andrews argued that developing combat effectiveness depended upon GHQ Air Force having more authority over air units. Westover, on the other hand, maintained that GHQ Air Force should be placed under the Chief of the

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<sup>130</sup> Jeffrey S. Underwood, The Wings of Democracy: The Influence of Air Power on the Roosevelt Administration, 1933-1941 (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), p. 84; Copp, Few, pp. 353-354; Shiner, Foulois, p. 210; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 360-361; Robert W. Krauskopf, "The Army and the Strategic Bomber, 1930-1939 Part II," Military Affairs 22 (Summer 1958): 209, 215.

<sup>131</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 37.

<sup>132</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 37.



Air Corps. In essence the two airmen, and their respective organizations, were engaged in a bureaucratic battle over control of the Air Corps.<sup>133</sup> Kenney simply stated, "there was a contest between the Chief of the Air Force [Westover] and the head of GHQ Air Force [Andrews]. I got caught in the middle of that argument."<sup>134</sup>

Westover's irritation with the position of GHQ Air Force and Andrews over the Air Corps must have been the central factor in Kenney's reassignment. As the chief of operations and training Kenney was an outspoken advocate of GHQ Air Force needing more authority, and his previous associations and friendship with Andrews gave Kenney some added influence over his chief.<sup>135</sup> Kenney's first task after the formation of the new headquarters set the stage for his relations with Westover's office. In the aftermath of the Air Mail fiasco, the Chief of the Air Corps planned to send a flight of ten bombers on a long-range trip from Washington to the Panama Canal. Since after March 1, 1935, the aircraft fell under Andrew's authority, he sent Kenney to inspect the aircraft and crews for the mission. Kenney found neither the planes nor the pilots prepared and suggested canceling the trip. Based on Kenney's inputs, and reports from other officers, Andrews scrubbed the flight. Westover protested, arguing that only he had the authority to cancel the mission, but the chief of staff of the Army upheld both Andrews' decision and his authority.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Copp, Few Great Captains, pp.350-353.

<sup>134</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 37.

<sup>135</sup> Kenney's contact with Andrews is spelled out in Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 314, 331, 350-351, 353.

<sup>136</sup> Underwood, p. 60; Copp, Few Great Captains, p. 302-303.

Kenney's comments and irreverent attitude towards the Army General Staff, most evident by his comments on the B-17 but probably made on other occasions, were also antithetical to one of Westover's primary goals since being selected for the position as Chief of the Air Corps--reducing friction between the ground soldiers and the Air Corps.<sup>137</sup> General Malin Craig, who named Westover as the Chief of the Air Corps in December of 1935, told the airman that he demanded "loyal support and hearty cooperation" from every member of the Air Corps, a directive which Westover promptly relayed.<sup>138</sup> Disposing of Kenney would not only remove an influential officer in the headquarters, but also send a message about the kind of comments and attitude Westover, and the Army General Staff, considered appropriate. Whether Westover or a ground officer initiated Kenney's move was unclear even to the participants at the time. Andrews would later write to Kenney: "There is still some influence working against your return to the GHQ Air Force, what it is I don't know."<sup>139</sup> Although Kenney tended to blame the General Staff, given Westover's control of Air Corps assignments it's likely that he was the one responsible for the move.

Whatever the reason behind the transfer, Kenney found himself exiled from the Air Corps to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, which schooled young infantry officers in the basics of ground combat. Andrews was deeply upset with the

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<sup>137</sup> Underwood, pp. 68-70.

<sup>138</sup> Memorandum from Craig to Westover, November 6, 1935, quoted in Underwood, p. 69.

<sup>139</sup> Letter Andrews to Kenney, February 18, 1937; Letter Andrews to Kenney, January 13, 1937, Andrews Papers, LOC.

loss of Kenney, both because of his professional abilities and their personal relationship. In an attempt to retain Kenney, Andrews wrote to General Malin Craig, the Army Chief of Staff. Kenney, he argued, was "a loyal, efficient, well-educated officer with war experience that is a particular asset to this headquarters . . . I cannot too urgently recommend his retention in his present position, not only in justice to the officer himself but in justice to this headquarters, and for the best interests of the service."<sup>140</sup> Despite his boss's pleas, Kenney was forced to move.

As an airman at the Infantry School Kenney was a logical choice to teach air liaison with ground forces, but he was also a regular instructor on the faculty, teaching, among other things, the proper methods for defending and attacking river crossings and leading machine gun drills. Although promoted to Major shortly after arriving at Fort Benning, this advancement did little to soften Kenney's disdain for the assignment.<sup>141</sup> After one year, and several previous attempts to leave, Kenney wrote to Frank Andrews imploring his old commander for an assignment away from the Infantry School "as soon as possible."<sup>142</sup> Andrews fought hard to get Kenney back to his headquarters. When Kenney left in 1936, Craig had promised Andrews that he would return Kenney in a year. In January 1937 Andrews reminded the Army Chief of Staff

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<sup>140</sup> Letter, Andrews to Craig, quoted in Copp, Few Great Captains, p. 354.

<sup>141</sup> War Department, Special Order Number 162, June 26, 1936, Kenney papers, HRA; Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 37-38.

<sup>142</sup> Letter, Kenney to Andrews, April 13, 1937; Letter, Kenney to Andrews, April 27, 1937; Andrews Papers.

of the promise, but his efforts on Kenney's behalf were in vain.<sup>143</sup> The Army chief of staff would not allow Kenney to return to GHQ Air Force, and forced the airmen to stay at Fort Benning for at least another year. Andrews was not only saddened by Craig's decision, but also felt "in some way responsible for your having been detailed to Benning."<sup>144</sup> While Craig played a role in the decision to delay Kenney's move, the Chief of the Air Corps also had a part in the decision as the feud between Westover and Andrews had continued throughout 1936 and into 1937, Kenney was probably still being exiled because of his previous reputation.<sup>145</sup>

Although rebuffed in 1937, Kenney was soon maneuvering to leave the Infantry School when the 1938 school year ended.<sup>146</sup> Unable to engineer Kenney's return to the GHQ Air Force staff, Andrews wanted him to be the commander of the 7th Bombardment Group, but told Kenney to see General Craig about leaving Fort Benning. Andrews wanted Kenney, but was afraid that "any further pressure I put on it will not only be useless, but may result in blocking the whole effort."<sup>147</sup> Kenney flew to Washington and met with the Army Chief of Staff and Westover. The meeting between Craig and Kenney was uneventful because the important decision about Kenney's next assignment was left up to Westover, who told Kenney that he could

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<sup>143</sup> Letter Andrews to Kenney, February 18, 1937; Letter Andrews to Kenney, January 13, 1937, Andrews Papers.

<sup>144</sup> Letter, Andrews to Kenney, June 8, 1937, Andrews Papers.

<sup>145</sup> Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 366-369.

<sup>146</sup> Letter, Kenney to Andrews, January 3, 1937 [1938], Andrews Papers.

<sup>147</sup> Letter, Andrews to Kenney, January 6, 1938, January 18, 1938, Andrews Papers.

leave Fort Benning, but he could not go to any assignment, in any capacity, that fell under GHQ Air Force. This not only prevented Kenney from returning to Andrews' staff, but also stopped him from going to any flying unit in GHQ Air Force. Westover offered Major Kenney the command of an observation squadron, which fell under the control of an army commander, a position normally held by a first lieutenant. Kenney was obviously fed up with infantry soldiers. Any flying assignment, no matter how bad, was preferable to more time at Fort Benning, and Kenney accepted command of the 89th Observation Squadron at Mitchel Field, New York, in the summer of 1938.<sup>148</sup>

About the time Kenney took command he was involved in one of the many episodes which soured relations between airmen and naval officers. During Kenney's time at the Infantry School the Air Corps had finally received some of the B-17s he had desired. During the 1938 Air Corps maneuvers they were being sent on reconnaissance missions to intercept a simulated enemy fleet sailing towards the east coast of the United States. With no actual targets to find, enterprising Air Corps officers suggested that intercepting the Italian oceanliner Rex which was sailing towards New York would not only provide good training, but also excellent publicity. Kenney managed to wrangle his way onboard one of the three B-17s which found the Rex over 700 miles at sea. The mission was broadcast coast-to-coast on radio and made

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<sup>148</sup> Letter, Andrews to Hugh Knerr, June 13, 1938; Andrews papers, LOC; Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 38-39; War Department Special Order Number 114, May 16 1938, Kenney papers, HRA

front page headlines across the country the next day.<sup>149</sup> While the event caught the public's attention, naval officers were incensed by the intrusion into their territory and demanded that henceforth all Army aircraft be restricted to within one hundred miles of the coast.<sup>150</sup>

Kenney's stint as an observation squadron commander did not last long and much of the time he was off on special assignments. The most important factor in his rehabilitation back into the mainstream of the Air Corps was the death of Westover in a plane crash in September 1938. Westover's replacement, first temporarily and then permanently, was Major General Hap Arnold who knew and respected Kenney's abilities. Although Kenney and Arnold had never been stationed together, and Kenney certainly could not be considered a protégé of Arnold, the two had met on occasion and, given the small number of officers in the Air Corps, it was likely that the two knew each other at least by reputation.<sup>151</sup>

Arnold soon needed all the help he could get. In November 1938 President Roosevelt, prompted by reports from Europe on the increasingly aggressive foreign policy of Nazi Germany, proposed an increase in aircraft production and in the size of

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<sup>149</sup> Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 418-423; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 406-408; Wolk, "Innovator," p. 132.

<sup>150</sup> Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 423-427; Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 408-411; Underwood, pp. 114-117.

<sup>151</sup> George C. Kenney, interview with Murray Green, July 18, 1969, New York, New York, p. 29, US Air Force Academy Library Special Collections. My thanks to Duane Reed for a copy of this interview. Wolk, "Innovator," p. 132. Although the number of officers in the Air Corps fluctuated from year-to-year, the officer corps was always quite small. In 1921 there were 975 Air Corps officers, in 1923, 867, and in 1926, 919. Although authorized by Congress in 1926 to have 1,650 officers, this goal was not reached until 1939. Maurer, Aviation in the U.S. Army, pp. 48, 202, 350.

the Air Corps. The president hoped to present his plan to Congress in January, and Air Corps officers spent the time between November and January hurriedly planning this expansion. Arnold recalled Kenney, and other officers, to Washington to develop a plan.<sup>152</sup> By the summer of 1939 Congress had authorized an increase that would triple the number of aircraft in the Air Corps. This initial boost was quickly followed by others after Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939.<sup>153</sup>

Given Kenney's earlier background in aircraft production, it was only logical for Arnold to move Kenney from his observation squadron to Wright Field near Dayton, Ohio, where he would be chief of the production engineering section. Beginning in May, 1939, his role at Wright Field was to oversee a staff that would translate Roosevelt's expansion plans into reality. Some of the details that concerned Kenney were the priority given to the types of aircraft that would be produced and what units would receive the finished products. In reality the big aircraft manufacturers, such as Boeing and Douglas, only made the airframes. The other parts of the aircraft, everything from engines and propellers to guns and tires, were bought by the Air Corps from other manufactures and then sent to the airframe maker. Juggling the Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) among the airframe manufacturers fell to Kenney, who became the point man for the Air Corps in ensuring the aircraft manufacturers met their production goals and that the aircraft were

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<sup>152</sup> "Summary of Activities," p. 2; Futrell, *Ideas*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>153</sup> Holley, *Buying Aircraft*, pp. 169-186; Futrell, *Ideas*, pp. 92-94.

delivered to the correct units.<sup>154</sup> In retrospect, Kenney felt that Arnold saw him as a "troubleshooter," someone who could be counted on to straighten out a situation. If Arnold needed confirmation of Kenney's talents as a leader and organizer, his stint at the Material Command provided ample proof. Kenney soon had the feeling that whenever Arnold saw an organization in trouble he picked up the phone and called Kenney.<sup>155</sup>

Kenney's work in increasing aircraft production was interrupted in February 1940 when he went to France as a military observer.<sup>156</sup> From February until April 1940 Kenney roamed all over France studying the aircraft, equipment, and organization of the French Air Force and the German aircraft that had either been shot down or forced to land in France. Kenney found American technology woefully behind what he discovered in Europe. He returned home with numerous recommendations for changes including the installation of armored seats for pilots and leak proof fuel tanks. He also urged more attention be given to equipment for high altitude flying. He found the oxygen masks and heated flying suits currently being produced in the United States

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<sup>154</sup> Summary of Activities," p. 2; 201 file; Holley, Buying Aircraft, pp. 462-463, 468-469; Craven and Cate, VI: 187; Perret, pp. 37-38.

<sup>155</sup> George C. Kenney, interview with Murray Green, New York, July 18, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>156</sup> 201 File; "Biographical Sketch," p. 2. In his memoirs Hap Arnold claimed that after Germany invaded Poland, "I at once sent two of the best officers in the Air Corps, Lieutenant Colonel 'Tooey' Spaatz and Major George C. Kenney, to Europe as combat observers." H. H. Arnold, Global Mission, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 192. In fact, since July 1938 the Air Corps had been trying to send observers to Europe. In January 1940 Great Britain and France acceded to the request and a number of Air Corps officers were sent to observe aerial operations, Martin P. Clauseen, "Material Research and Development in the Army Air Arm, 1914-1945," Army Air Forces Historical Study Number 50, pp. 156-160; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., The Army Air Forces in World War II, vol. 1, Plans and Early Operations, January 1939 to August 1942 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 109.



were inferior to the ones he found in a German aircraft shot down near the Swiss border. The lack of fire power in U.S. aircraft also concerned Kenney. His visit convinced him that American aircraft should be equipped with powered gun turrets and .50 caliber ammunition instead of .30 caliber. Experiences during the war had also convinced French and British officials to eliminate the observation balloon and the two-seater observation aircraft.<sup>157</sup> Before leaving Paris for the United States, Kenney raised a lot of eyebrows in the War Department when he bluntly told American journalist Clare Booth, "I've got to get home and help undo a hell of a lot of mistakes we've been making in our plane construction. If we don't pull ourselves together and undo them fast, we might as well throw half our air force into the ash-can."<sup>158</sup>

Although Kenney had an open, friendly manner, Booth was also impressed by the intensity and forcefulness of his observations.<sup>159</sup> Kenney's reports, and those of other air observers, spurred immediate interest in the Air Corps and the War Department, but it proved difficult to implement all of the changes Kenney recommended. Such modifications would invariably delay production and in the summer of 1940, after the defeat of France, the pressure to produce large quantities of aircraft outweighed the demand for qualitative improvements.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 43-35; Kenney, interview with Stanley, pp. 13-16; "Summary of Activities," p. 3; Colonel J. M. Churchill, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Memorandum, Subject: Air Corps Procurement, F. Y. 1941, April 18, 1940, file 248. 501 HRA. This memorandum was prepared by Kenney.

<sup>158</sup> Booth, p. 174.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-174.

<sup>160</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 45; Claussen, pp. 98-100; Holley, Buying Aircraft, pp. 512-515.

Kenney was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel (again) during his sojourn in France and upon his return to Wright Field was made the second in command of the Material Division of the Air Corps, the organization responsible for not only design and construction of aircraft, but logistics as well.<sup>161</sup> Although technically second in command, Kenney actually functioned as the head of the Material Division because of a decision in 1939 to move the chief of the division to the Air Corps headquarters in Washington so that he could better supervise the overall direction of production and represent the Air Corps in negotiations with other agencies.<sup>162</sup> Kenney's position made him responsible for most of the internal production matters, such as negotiating contracts, inspecting and accepting new products.<sup>163</sup> In January 1941 Kenney was named as the Commander of the Air Corps Experimental Depot and Engineering School, which added testing and evaluating new aircraft and equipment to his duties guiding the acquisition of new aircraft.<sup>164</sup> Perhaps this position also allowed Kenney to indulge the new ideas he amassed during his trip to Europe. In February 1941, shortly after becoming the Commander the Air Corps Depot, Kenney was promoted from Lieutenant Colonel to Brigadier General, skipping the rank of Colonel altogether,

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<sup>161</sup> 201 File; War Department Biography, "George C. Kenney," March 9, 1942, Hugh A. Knerr Papers, LOC.

<sup>162</sup> Claussen, pp. 54-55; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., The Army Air Forces in World War II, vol. 4, The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942 to July 1944 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), pp. 294-296.

<sup>163</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:296-298.

<sup>164</sup> 201 File; War Department Biography; Holley, Buying Aircraft, pp. 97, 468-469.

a reflection of the vast expansion transforming the American armed forces in the two years prior to Pearl Harbor.<sup>165</sup>

Kenney remained with the Engineering Section until March 1942 when he was named the commander of 4th Air Force in San Francisco, and promoted to Major General. In this capacity Kenney was responsible for the air defense of the west coast of the United States and for training fighter and bomber crews for the combat theaters. Arnold evidently sent Kenney to California in an attempt to reduce the high accident rate in the P-38 and the A-29 while continuing to train new aircrews and protecting the Pacific coast of the United States. An investigation by Brigadier General Barney Giles, who was on the staff of 4th Air Force, revealed that most of the problems were in training procedures and recommended the use of a two seat model of the P-38 to give novice pilots instruction under the direct supervision and control of an instructor. Kenney recommended the introduction of this change and also established changes in the procedures for engine failures in the P-38. The result was a drastic reduction in the accident rate, but after only four months Kenney was ordered to Washington. He was going to war.<sup>166</sup>

Kenney would take into his combat command a blend of technical expertise and in-depth knowledge of air strategy and operations that would be important factors in his

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<sup>165</sup> 201 file.

<sup>166</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 46-47; Kenney, Reports, pp. 8-9, 15. In one version of this story Kenney stated that Arnold promised to assign Kenney to an operational command when aircraft production reached 4,000 planes a month. While this may be true, there were also other factors that went into the timing of Kenney's move.

performance in the Southwest Pacific. While his combat experience gained in World War I gave him credibility among the officers and soldiers when he assumed command, it also helped him understand what the people in his command were experiencing which undoubtedly affected his judgment and decisions. Combat experience alone, however, was not enough to make a high level commander.

Beginning at MIT, and later at the Air Service Engineering School and his various assignments in the technical areas of the Air Corps, Kenney became very familiar with the technical capabilities of aircraft and knowledgeable about the science of aviation. He was quite open to and comfortable with technical innovation. He experimented in many areas, not only developing the parachute fragmentation bomb but also in moving machine guns from the engine cowlings to the wings of an aircraft. His observations from Europe demonstrated the close attention he paid to the types of changes that were needed in U.S. aircraft. While the nature of flying required some scientific and technical knowledge of every airmen, Kenney went beyond most of them in learning this area of his craft. According to one author, his scientific curiosity marked him as a unique officer.<sup>167</sup>

Besides his familiarity with aircraft design, Kenney's association with the aircraft industry also contributed to his success as an air commander. As a service representative, and later in coordinating aircraft production, Kenney became aware of

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<sup>167</sup> In commenting on General "Hap" Arnold, one author noted: "Unlike [Lieutenant General Ira C.] Eaker, [General Carl A.] Spaatz, or [Lieutenant General Frank M.] Andrews, or for that matter any of his senior commanders *with the possible exception of George Kenney*, Hap Arnold had always been genuinely interested in scientific development." DeWitt S. Copp, *Forged in Fire* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), p. 412, emphasis added.

the methods and techniques of large scale manufacturing and production. This knowledge enabled him to better organize the extensive repair and maintenance needs of his combat air force.

It was his professional military education which furnished Kenney with a deeper insight into the problems of warfare. Attendance at the Army service schools was a necessity for further promotion, and Kenney's selection for Air Corps Tactical School, the Command and General Staff School and the War College were testimony to his past performance and future potential. Attendance at these schools exposed Kenney to some of the ground commanders he would deal with during the war, provided him with an appreciation for how they intended to wage war, and equipped him with a common language to communicate with his ground counterparts. Even his two year stint at the Infantry School, despite its onerous nature, added to Kenney's understanding of the details involved in ground warfare. In addition, Kenney's years as an instructor at the Air Corps Tactical School and authorship of the textbooks on attack aviation forced him, like many other officers, to develop a deeper professional expertise through continued education.<sup>168</sup>

Finally, as a staff officer, first in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps and later at GHQ Air Force, Kenney experienced the "unglamorous" side of aviation--the planning and paperwork necessary to move air units thousands of miles and provide the logistical support needed for sustained combat operations. At GHQ Air Force, Kenney

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<sup>168</sup> Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," p. 212; Berlin, p. 158. Berlin notes that all of the U.S. Army corps commanders in World War II had served as instructors in one of the service schools.

organized air units for combat employment, proscribed training requirements for aviators, and planned maneuvers. In short, he was engaged in many of the same activities that would occupy him in 1942.

The product of all these experiences was Kenney's knowledge of modern warfare and a strong belief in the unique contribution of air power to military operations. Although Kenney was familiar with theories on strategic bombardment and appreciated the impact caused through such attacks, he was not obsessed with this application of air power. While he believed that air power would have a substantial impact in war, his view was more comprehensive than the strategic bombing advocates. Kenney was familiar with the benefits of reconnaissance from his flying in World War I. His teaching and research at the Tactical School in attack aviation had emphasized the use of aircraft against troops and supplies on the roads, but he also acknowledged that gaining control of the air was a necessary first step. By the late 1930s, he had become familiar with ideas about parachuting soldiers from aircraft to attack "sensitive points throughout our rear areas"<sup>169</sup> and appreciated the use of air transports for moving troops and supplies since aircraft were "not dependent upon roads, railroads, bridges, or terrain."<sup>170</sup> Airlifting troops and supplies, he believed, was "definitely a part of modern warfare."<sup>171</sup> By comparison, a long-time instructor in strategic

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<sup>169</sup> George C. Kenney, "The Airplane in Modern Warfare," U.S. Air Services July 1938, p. 17.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

bombardment at the Tactical School was "surprised" by the use of paratroops in World War II.<sup>172</sup>

In the years before the war Kenney also prepared himself to be an air leader and commander by understanding the nature of a combat air force. The primary task of an air commander, Kenney believed, was to integrate and coordinate the various components of the organization. "An Air Force is not merely a collection of airplanes," he wrote in 1938, "anymore than...a certain number of men constitutes an army."<sup>173</sup> An effective Air Force, he maintained, needed a variety of aircraft to accomplish a host of missions and "a well-organized and operating system of supply," to provide the bombs and equipment needed to fly the aircraft.<sup>174</sup> To be successful, Kenney added, the air commander also needed the ability to communicate to his units spread out over many airfields; a system to provide warning of impending enemy air attacks; the ability to forecast the weather conditions before missions were flown; a sufficient number of air and ground crews; and a trained staff to plan air operations.<sup>175</sup> In essence, Kenney defined the difficulties he would later wrestle with during his years as an air commander--building and maintaining the components of a combat air organization.

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<sup>172</sup> Major General Donald Wilson, interview with Hugh N. Ahmann, Carmel, California, December 10-11, 1975, p. 149, file K239.0512-878 HRA.

<sup>173</sup> Kenney, "The Airplane in Modern Warfare," p. 17.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Experienced as a combat pilot, well-versed in the scientific and material aspects of aviation, and knowledgeable both in the academic and practical aspects of military operations, George Kenney was among the most qualified Air Corps officers to become a theater air commander.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Compared to some more well-known air officers, Kenney's background seems especially impressive. One of Kenney's contemporaries, Carl A. Spaatz, who commanded the Eighth Air Force and the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe during World War II and became the first Chief of Staff of the Air Force, according to historian Richard Davis, "showed little appreciation of, if not disdain for, the academic side of the military profession." Furthermore, Spaatz "did not display great enthusiasm for the technical aspects of airframe and engine research and development," and "he was never assigned to his service's technological areas." Davis also believes that Spaatz's "ignorance of and antipathy toward ground matters gave him little appreciation for military problems other than those dealing with air." Davis, pp. 33, 594. Also see, David R. Mets, "Carl Spaatz: A Model for Leadership?" Air Leadership, Wayne Thompson, ed., (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1986), pp. 3-14.



## Chapter Four

### Taking Command, August 1942 to January 1943

**"No matter what I accomplished, it would be an improvement."<sup>1</sup>**

On July 7, 1942, Major General George Kenney left Fourth Air Force in San Francisco for a combat command. His new assignment would demand all of his prior knowledge of air warfare, plus a generous dose of skill in dealing with other officers. Kenney spent the first months in the southwest Pacific reorganizing his command, developing appropriate air plans, and battling the Japanese over the eastern half of New Guinea. This reorganization not only increased the combat capability of his forces, it also helped Kenney earn the trust of the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur.

When Kenney learned that he was leaving the United States for combat, General Arnold told him that he would be sent to Cairo to replace Major General Lewis Brereton as the air commander in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> By the time Kenney arrived in

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<sup>1</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Kenney diary, July 7, 11, 1942. Kenney Papers, Center for Air Force History, Washington, D.C., This collection of eleven binders contains diary entries, letters, and messages from December 8, 1941 to September 3, 1945. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated as KP. Message, Maxwell to Marshall, June 29, 1942, Henry H. Arnold Papers, Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, D.C.; Marshall to MacArthur, July 6, 1942, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial Museum and Archives (MMA), Norfolk, Virginia; Kenney interview with Hasdorff, p. 108. Either out of professional courtesy, or for

Washington for briefings at the War Department a few days later, there had been a change of plans. The problems with Brereton had been cleared up and Kenney was now headed for Australia. He spent the next few days, as he put it, "absorbing all the dope" he could on the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA).<sup>3</sup>

Within the overall Allied strategy for World War II, the Southwest Pacific did not have a high priority. The threat from Japan was not totally dismissed by American military planners, but the focus of offensive operations was on Europe with a defensive "holding" strategy planned for the Pacific. Not even the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed this decision. At a strategy conference with the British in late December 1941, American policymakers reaffirmed their commitment to the defeat of Germany first.<sup>4</sup>

The initial phase of the "Germany first" strategy was predicated on the United States expanding war production while maintaining a defensive posture. American commanders would engage in combat only to hold potential base areas and ensure that the supply lines from the United States to the combat theaters remained open. Crucial to the war effort during this period was support by the United States, in the form of war material, strategic bombing, and naval blockades, for the Allies already engaged

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personal reasons, Kenney does not say in his book that he had been tapped to relieve Brereton who was not replaced. Instead, Kenney simply stated that his destination was a secret. Kenney, Reports, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Kenney diary, July 13, 1942, KP.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942 (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953), pp. 9-31, 95-119; Grace P. Hayes, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan (Washington: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 38; Spector, Eagle, pp. 123-124; Gerhard Weinberg, A World At Arms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 305-306.

in combat. After American forces had been equipped and trained, an attack on Germany would be carried out. Only after the victory in Europe would the United States prosecute the war against Japan with full force.<sup>5</sup> Kenney gloomily concluded, "No one is really interested in the Pacific."<sup>6</sup>

Kenney's somewhat exaggerated assessment was based on the low priority for aircraft, supplies, and people for commanders in the Southwest Pacific. The chief of the Army Air Forces was especially determined not to spread air units all over the world. General "Hap" Arnold wanted to concentrate on sending the maximum number of aircraft against Germany in a strategic bombing campaign, telling Kenney that the 600 aircraft in the Pacific were all he could expect.<sup>7</sup> Arnold commented acerbically that Kenney's predecessor, Lieutenant General George H. Brett, "kept yelling for equipment all the time, although he should have enough already," and that despite the large numbers of aircraft that Arnold had sent, "there didn't seem to be much flying going on."<sup>8</sup> The message for Kenney was clear: make do with what you have. Although Arnold would not be Kenney's direct boss in carrying out combat operations, Kenney remained dependent on the Army Air Forces commander for the aircraft, supplies and people that he needed to carry out the air war in the southwest Pacific.

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<sup>5</sup> Hayes, pp. 108-114.

<sup>6</sup> Kenney diary, July 13, 1942, KP.

<sup>7</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 11; Hayes, pp. 118-120; Spector, pp. 206-207; Craven and Cate, 4:x, xi-xii.

<sup>8</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 11.

Thus, the words carried a lot of weight, and Kenney would correspond with Arnold frequently throughout the war.

During his time in Washington Kenney learned that one of the most important challenges he would face in the Southwest Pacific was in developing an effective working relationship with his superior in combat operations: the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur, a man who had been unimpressed by the combat performance of the air units under his command.

When World War II erupted MacArthur was the commander of American Army forces in the Far East, headquartered in the Philippines, and bore the full brunt of the Japanese attack. One of the forces at MacArthur's disposal for the defense of the islands was the Far East Air Force, the Army air component in the Pacific which, by December 1941, possessed over 300 aircraft. Unfortunately, only the 107 P-40s and the 35 B-17s in the islands were considered modern combat aircraft, and even fewer of those were actually ready for combat missions.<sup>9</sup> When Major General Lewis H. Brereton, named commander of the Far Eastern Air Force in early November 1941, arrived in the Philippines he was dismayed by the conditions he found: pilots and mechanics were inadequately trained in flying or maintaining the aircraft; the air raid warning network was almost nonexistent; and there was a lack of spare parts for the

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<sup>9</sup> Craven and Cate, 1: 175-188, 192. Walter Edmonds claims that only 54 pursuit planes and 34 B-17s were actually in combat flying condition on December 8, 1941. Part of the difference in the number of combat aircraft available resulted from varying judgments about the flying or combat condition of aircraft under repair. Walter D. Edmonds, They Fought With What They Had: The Story of the Army Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific, 1941-1942 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951; reprinted, Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1992), p. 71.

aircraft.<sup>10</sup> While he started to remedy the situation, the Japanese attack cut short the time available.

The lack of preparations for war became clear after the devastating Japanese attack on the Philippines the morning of December 8, 1941. Half of the available aircraft in the Philippines were destroyed, including 18 of the 35 B-17s. The communications center and radar installation on Clark Field received direct hits during the attack and were almost totally destroyed, making it impossible to coordinate any interception against further Japanese attacks. The American pilots were, relative to the Japanese, poorly trained, and, in the end, American air power could not stop the Japanese air attacks or the eventual ground invasion of the Philippines.<sup>11</sup>

While fighter units tried desperately to intercept and defeat further Japanese air raids that were now free to attack ground forces and supplies, the surviving B-17s were moved to Darwin Field in northern Australia, and on December 24 MacArthur ordered Brereton to relocate his air headquarters to Australia.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the exact cause for the loss of the aircraft in the Philippines, and there are a number, MacArthur refused to accept responsibility for the debacle. Neither did he blame his chief of staff, Major General Richard K. Sutherland.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis H. Brereton, The Brereton Diaries (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1946), pp. 5-44.

<sup>11</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:209; Brereton, 44-52; D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur, 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970-1985), II:3-6. William H. Bartsch, Doomed at the Start: American Pursuit Pilots in the Philippines, 1941-1942 (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), passim.

<sup>12</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:209; Brereton, 57-63; James, Years, II:16-17.

<sup>13</sup> In his memoirs MacArthur refrained from criticizing Brereton directly; he, nevertheless, made it clear that Brereton deserved most of the blame. Douglas MacArthur, Reminiscences (New York:

When Japan's imminent conquest of the Philippines became clear, President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur's evacuation to Australia to become the commander of the newly formed Southwest Pacific Area. This was a new command, not envisioned prior to the war, but formed in reaction to the events following the Japanese offensive that swept through the Pacific.

In February 1942, President Roosevelt suggested to Prime Minister Winston Churchill a division of strategic responsibilities. Roosevelt advocated dividing the world into three regions for prosecuting the war: the Pacific, the Middle and Far East, and Europe. The United States would be primarily responsible for the development of strategy in the Pacific, Great Britain in the Middle and Far East, and both would share responsibility for Europe.<sup>14</sup> After this plan was accepted, the American Chiefs of Staff further subdivided the Pacific into two major areas: the Central and the Southwest Pacific, naming Admiral Chester Nimitz commander of the Central Pacific and MacArthur commander of the Southwest Pacific. Both would advance against the

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McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 120. Brereton blamed the loss of the aircraft on the lack of preparation and infrastructure, along with Sutherland's meddling in air affairs and MacArthur's indecisiveness on December 8. Brereton wanted to carry out an air attack of Formosa but Sutherland would not let him talk to MacArthur. The Japanese struck after permission for the attack had been received and the bombers were on the ground being readied for the mission. Sutherland stressed the fact that Brereton disobeyed previous orders to move the B-17s south and believed this move would have preserved the bomber force. Brereton, pp. 38-43; 64-66; Craven and Cate, VI:209. When MacArthur was writing his memoirs Sutherland urged him to address the issue and called Brereton's remarks about Sutherland's interference "egregious lies." Letter, Sutherland to MacArthur, August 1, 1951, RG 10, MMMA. Discussions about blame for the event have not abated with time. D. Clayton James, MacArthur's biographer, believes that, "The question of where to put the blame for the Clark Field disaster continues in a tangle of personalities and contradictory data." D. Clayton James, "The Other Pearl Harbor," MHO: The Quarterly Journal of Military History 7 (Winter 1995): 25-26, for other examinations of the attack, none of which reach any definitive explanation, see, Spector, Eagle, pp. 106-108; James, Years, II:6-14; Edmonds, pp. 86-93; Robert F. Futrell, "Air Hostilities in the Philippines, 8 December 1941," Air University Review 16 (January-February 1965): 33-45.

<sup>14</sup> Matloff and Snell, 1941-1942, pp. 165-166.

Japanese in two different directions. MacArthur advancing from his base in Australia through New Guinea to the Philippines, while Nimitz used his naval forces to capture islands through the Central Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Although this divided command was not an optimum solution, and was constantly decried during the war, given the number of ships, planes, and soldiers the United States was able to field, the decision actually created more problems for the Japanese because it allowed the United States to attack smaller numbers of enemy forces than would have been concentrated against a single thrust.<sup>16</sup> (Figure 1)

On April 18, 1942, shortly after arriving in Australia, MacArthur was officially named the commander of the newly established Southwest Pacific Area and organized his force into three Allied component commands: Allied Air Forces, under Lieutenant General George H. Brett; Allied Land Forces, led by Australian General Thomas Blamey; and, Allied Naval Forces, commanded by U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Herbert F. Leary.<sup>17</sup>

Brett's relationship with MacArthur was rocky from the beginning and problems between the two may have begun prior to MacArthur's arrival in Australia. When the war began Brett had been attending a military conference in Chungking, China, and was ordered to Australia to assume command of all U. S. forces and establish a supply base to support future combat operations.

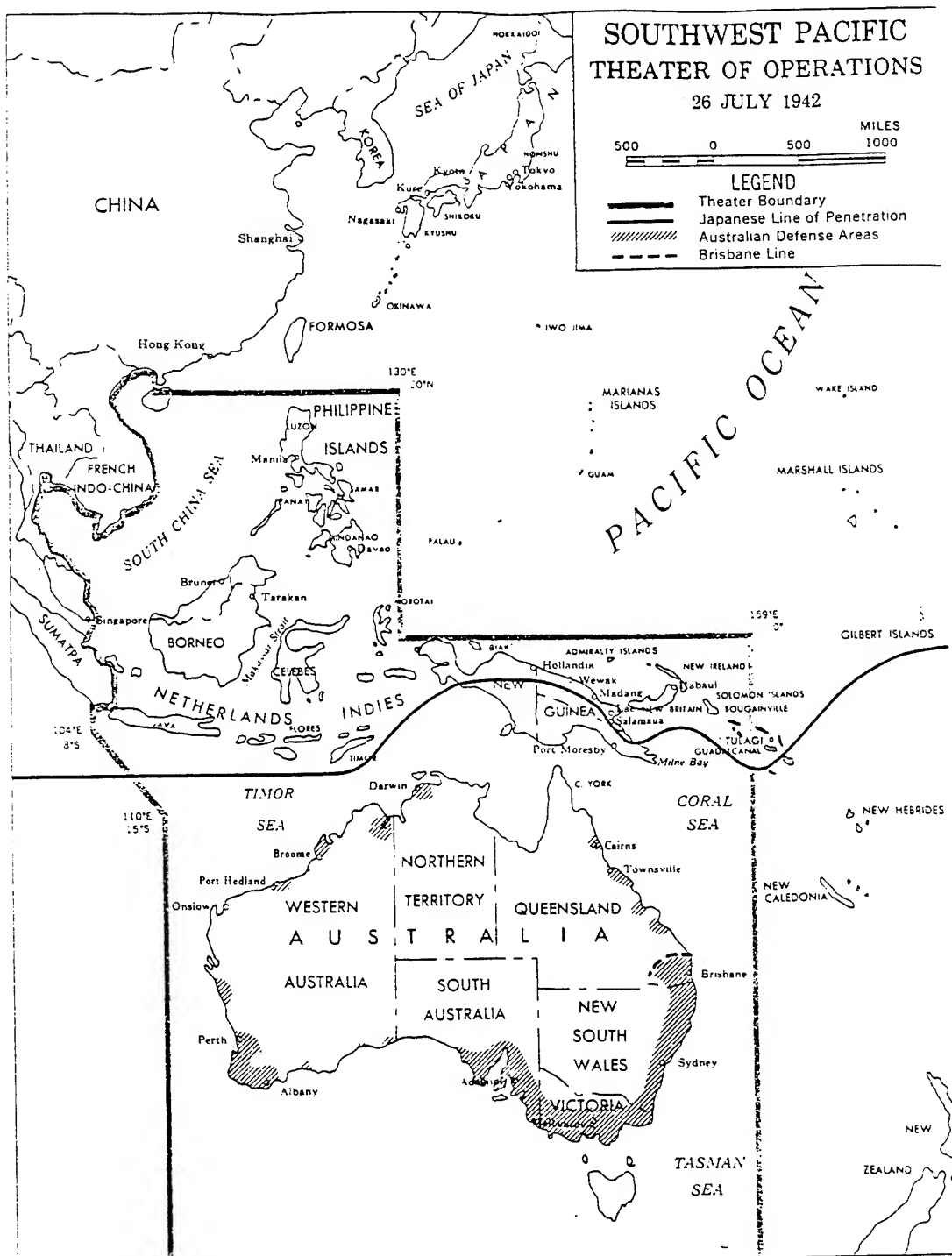
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<sup>15</sup> Hayes, pp. 88-103.

<sup>16</sup> For a similar conclusion see Weinberg, p. 341. For a different perspective see Spector, who argues that the two advances, "might well have led to disaster." Spector, *Eagle*, pp. xiii, 144-147.

<sup>17</sup> Craven and Cate, 4: 7.

Figure 1--Southwest Pacific Area--Theater of Operations<sup>18</sup>



<sup>18</sup> Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters Army Forces, Pacific, Engineers of the Southwest Pacific, vol. 6, Airfield and Air Base Development (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office), p. 12.



Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall emphasized to Brett that MacArthur, who was then still battling in the Philippines, was the senior Army officer in the region, and Brett would be subordinate to MacArthur's U.S. Army Forces in the Far East. Despite being under the command of MacArthur, Brett was instructed by Marshall to submit a recommendation about what could be done to assist the American forces in the Philippines.<sup>19</sup> These instructions put Brett in the somewhat awkward position of a subordinate proposing actions that would affect his higher-level commander.

Brett arrived in Australia on December 31, 1941, and after a quick orientation, advised Marshall that he had little capability to carry out or support combat operations and suggested that reinforcements to the Philippines be stopped. Brett's suggestion, along with similar recommendations already under consideration in the War Department, led to a review of the effort to reinforce the beleaguered forces on the Philippines.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, MacArthur was aware of Brett's message and probably thought Brett disloyal for recommending the abandonment of the Philippines.

Brett's standing further diminished during MacArthur's departure from the Philippines. MacArthur's party left Corregidor in Navy patrol boats and traveled to the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, planning to transfer to B-17s for the flight to Australia. When MacArthur arrived there were no B-17s. Of the four dispatched by Brett only one had made it to Mindinanao, but it was in such poor

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<sup>19</sup> Letter, R.C. Moore, Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Army to Brett, 19 December 1941, Lester J. Whitlock Papers, MHI; Message, Marshall to Brett, 24 December 1941, The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, ed. Larry I. Bland, 3 vols. to date, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991- ), III:38.

<sup>20</sup> Craven and Cate, 1:231-233.

condition that it was sent back to Australia. Four new B-17s were then flown to Mindanao, but two of these were forced to turn back because of mechanical problems. Although MacArthur was not altogether happy with the condition of the two that landed, he continued his journey to Australia. While Brett bore the brunt of MacArthur's criticism, he cannot be entirely blamed for this fiasco. Brett knew that most of his aircraft could not make this journey, and requested the use of new B-17s from Rear Admiral Herbert F. Leary, the Allied naval commander in Australia, for the first mission. Leary refused Brett's request, only allowing the use of the new B-17s after a message from MacArthur prompted intervention from Washington. In MacArthur's mind Brett was to blame for the incident. Perhaps not surprisingly, when MacArthur arrived in Melbourne he repeatedly snubbed Brett.<sup>21</sup>

It is also likely that MacArthur viewed Brett as a competitor for influence and position in the theater. While Brett was the designated subordinate, he was the ranking American officer in Australia upon his arrival, requiring that he develop a working relationship with the Australian Prime Minister John Curtin and his government independent of MacArthur, at least temporarily. In early 1942, when command arrangements were still unsettled, Curtin had nominated Brett as commander in the region.<sup>22</sup> Curtin's offer of the high command, which Brett declined, represented a challenge to MacArthur's relationship with the Prime Minister and MacArthur's role as

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<sup>21</sup> MacArthur, p. 145; George Brett with Jack Kofoed, "The MacArthur I Knew," True, October 1947, pp. 139-140.

<sup>22</sup> Brett, "MacArthur," pp. 140, 142; David M. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy, 1939-1945 (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 180.

the allied commander.<sup>23</sup> While working closely with the incumbent Prime Minister, who represented the Labor Party, Brett had also developed a cozy relationship with Australian politicians from the opposition party who promised him the high command position, should they be re-elected.<sup>24</sup> Despite Brett's claim, written after the war, that he never wanted to be the theater commander, at least one observer thought that Brett deeply resented being replaced. He attributed Brett's being relieved from duty in the southwest Pacific to "the complete failure of Brett to accommodate" to MacArthur's wishes.<sup>25</sup>

In dealing with the Australian forces Brett's actions were especially in conflict with MacArthur's ideas. When Kenney arrived in Australia, he found a mix of Australian and American officers in the air headquarters. The chief of staff for the Allied Air Forces was Air Vice Marshall William D. Bostock of the RAAF and of the five directorates in the headquarters (operations, plans, intelligence, defense, and communications), Americans headed just two--operations and plans--while the remainder were under Australian officers.<sup>26</sup> Despite the balanced representation at the

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<sup>23</sup> MacArthur's ego and his fear of rivals is recounted in James's biography, especially II:717-720, and James, *Time*, 240-241. Robert Eichelberger, who believed he suffered because of MacArthur's ego, recorded his views about MacArthur's fears in letters to his wife, Jay Luvaas, ed., *Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), passim, and Paul Chiwalkowski, *In Caesar's Shadow: The Life of General Robert Eichelberger* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp. 86-87.

<sup>24</sup> George C. Kenney, interview with D. Clayton James, July 16, 1971, New York, New York, pp. 13-15, file 168.7103-24 HRA; Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, pp. 100-103; Kenney, interview with Green, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Paul P. Rogers, *The Good Years: MacArthur and Sutherland*, (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 275, 278, quote on p. 278. Rogers worked as a clerk, stenographer, and typist in MacArthur's office during the war. For Brett's thoughts see "MacArthur I Knew," pp. 141-142.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962), pp. 473-477; Craven and Cate, I:420. Colonels Eugene L. Eubank and Ross G. Hoyt

upper levels of the headquarters, most of the lower ranking officers in the staff were Australians who had transferred directly from the RAAF headquarters, making the Australians numerically dominant in the headquarters.<sup>27</sup>

Although Brett did make a conscious effort to forge a unified air command, and felt that the Australians were a "good bunch" who wanted "to be a very definite part of the war," the number of RAAF officers in the headquarters was indicative more of a lack of qualified American officers than a concern for Allied relations.<sup>28</sup> In January Brett had asked the War Department for more qualified American staff officers, but his plea went unanswered.<sup>29</sup> In the succeeding months Brett continued his requests, but with little result. There was nothing Washington could do to help--the rapid and massive expansion of the United States military had made proven officers a rare commodity. The shortage of American officers had even forced Brett to use Australians, who had been trained differently and spoke in a manner that many Americans initially found difficult to understand which lead to confusion especially over the cockpit intercoms, as copilots in American aircraft.<sup>30</sup> In this, as in other

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headed the plans and operations directorates, Air Commodore Joseph G. Hewitt, RAAF, was the director of intelligence, while Group Captains F.R.W. Scherger and Carn S. Wiggins, were, respectively, directors of defense and communications.

<sup>27</sup> Gillison, p. 478.

<sup>28</sup> George Brett, "Comments of Gen. Brett Re: Personnel, Etc.," compilation of statements given to Kenney on August 3, 1942, KP.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall papers, 3:76-77.

<sup>30</sup> Message, Brett to War Department, February 18, 1942, file 704.162A HRA; Message, Brett to Arnold, April 10, 1942, RG 4, MMMA; Lieutenant General George H. Brett, "Report to Army Air Forces Headquarters," May 1942, file 730.101-1 HRA, section S, p. 4, Letter, Commanding General Allied Air Forces Southwest Pacific Area (Brett) to Commanding General Army Air Forces, May 13, 1942, section F; Kathleen Williams, "The AAF in Australia to the Summer of 1942," Army Air Forces Historical Studies, no. 9, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Historical Division, July 1944, pp.

areas, Brett was compelled to combine Americans and Australians out of necessity, not, as Kenney believed, because of his great desire to improve Allied cooperation.<sup>31</sup>

Life at the air bases further reflected Brett's dependence on Australians. The Australians divided the country into five military areas, the area commander, all of whom were Australian ground officers, controlled the aircraft in sector. In addition, the commanders of the individual aircraft bases were RAAF officers. Because of a lack of officers for command and administrative positions and no established supply system, American airmen and soldiers were forced to use Australian administrative procedures which the Americans found confusing and unfamiliar.<sup>32</sup> While Brett was not entirely comfortable with this situation there was little he could do. In the words of one author, "no other arrangement was possible."<sup>33</sup> The views of American airmen at these bases about Australian control is not clear. While some Americans may have

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77-80. For other comments on Australians flying in American units see N. M. Parnell, "Reminiscences of a Radio Operator," American Aviation Historical Society Journal, 32 (Winter 1987): 260; E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, Yanks Down Under, 1941-1945 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 277; Lex MacAulay, Battle of the Bismarck Sea (New York: St. Martins Press, 1991), pp. 26-27. Even as late as March 1943, Australian co-pilots were being used in some American squadrons, see Fifth Bomber Command, "Tactical Reports of Attacks on Bismarck Sea Convoy," March 1943, Richard K. Sutherland Papers, RG 200, National Archives.

<sup>31</sup> The prevailing interpretation of Brett's motives seems to be drawn largely from Kenney's observations. In Kenney's memoirs he noted, "In order to make it a truly Allied organization, the Americans and Australians were thoroughly mixed everywhere...even in the airplane crews." Kenney, Reports, p. 32. D. Clayton James echoes this view, "Brett held the Australian airmen in high esteem, carrying the Allied partnership so far as to require every American bomber pilot to have an Australian copilot and vice versa." James, Years, 2: 197.

<sup>32</sup> Gillison, p. 478; Craven and Cate, 1: 420-431.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, pp. 70-74 quote on p. 74.

resented Australian control, others noted the good personal relations between Australians and Americans.<sup>34</sup>

The attitude of MacArthur and his staff toward the Australians was, however, uniformly negative. While MacArthur's role as the commander of the Southwest Pacific theater was as an Allied commander, he was supported by a headquarters staff made up of extremely loyal U.S. Army officers who had left the Philippines with him. Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall chided MacArthur on the composition of the staff, urging him to include Australian and Dutch officers. MacArthur claimed that he could not comply with Marshall's order; there was a dearth of qualified Dutch officers and the best Australian officers were fully occupied in duties with the rapidly expanding Australian army.<sup>35</sup>

Brett felt that MacArthur's headquarters gave "little consideration to the Australians" and maintained that "there is every indication that the Australians are being side-stepped altogether."<sup>36</sup> The director of intelligence for the Allied Air Forces, an Australian officer, found the mixing Americans and Australians "unpopular with MacArthur and the subject of diatribes by Sutherland who had no time for

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<sup>34</sup> "Report on Operations Carried Out May 21 to May 27, 1942," From: Air Officer Commanding, Northwestern Area, To: Headquarters Allied Air Forces, 4 June 1942, p. 2, file 706.01A HRA; J. E. Hewitt, Adversity in Success (Victoria, Australia: Langate Publishing, 1980), p. 35; Williams, p. 145.

<sup>35</sup> MacArthur, p. 141; James, Years, 2: 98-100; 117-124; Matloff and Snell, 1941-1942, pp. 168-173. In describing MacArthur's staff, Ronald Spector notes, "MacArthur brought with him from the Philippines a group of loyal and deferential--critics said sycophantic--subordinates who served as his key staff officers and assistants throughout the war." p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> "Comments of General Brett;" Brett, "MacArthur," p. 146.

Australians."<sup>37</sup> When General Eichelberger arrived in the country he was told by MacArthur to pay his respects to the Australians "and then have nothing further to do with them."<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, who came to the southwest Pacific in early 1943 as commander of Sixth Army, learned upon his arrival that he would operate as the commander of an independent task force. Although never officially informed about the reason for this organization, Krueger suspected that MacArthur and his staff designed it to prevent General Blamey, the Australian in charge of the Allied Land Forces, from controlling American combat forces.<sup>39</sup>

Undoubtedly some of the tension between Americans and Australians grew out of ignorance. Reportedly, many American servicemen did not even know that the Australians spoke English.<sup>40</sup> Donald Wilson, Kenney's chief of staff and a brigadier general in the Army, admitted that he arrived in Australia knowing little about the region despite having spent several years in the Philippines. "In my mind," Wilson remembered, "Australia was an insignificant island . . . on the 'under' side of the Earth."<sup>41</sup> No doubt this geographic and cultural ignorance exacerbated the differences that officers encountered over such fundamental issues as fighting methods,

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<sup>37</sup> Hewitt, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> Luvaas, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Krueger, From Down Under to Nippon (Washington, D.C.: Combat Forces Press, 1953), p. 10; General George H. Decker interview with Lieutenant Colonel Dan H. Ralls, 9 November 1972, Washington, D.C, pp. 18-19, MHI; General Clyde D. Eddleman with Lieutenant Colonels Lowell G. Smith and Murray G. Swindler, 28 January 1975, p. 27, MHI.

<sup>40</sup> Potts, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, p. 270.

organization, and language.<sup>42</sup> Major General Robert C. Richardson, sent by Marshall to investigate conditions in Australia, provided added justification for MacArthur's feelings about the influence of the Australians in Brett's command: "The present organization of the American Air Forces, under which our pilots receive their combat missions from Australians, is resented throughout the entire command from top to bottom."<sup>43</sup>

MacArthur's feelings toward Brett might have been tempered by an outstanding combat performance from the air units, but their accomplishments since the start of the war had been remarkably poor. Whatever confidence MacArthur may have had prior to the war in the possible efficacy of air power was badly shaken by the defeat in the Philippines. The loss of the American aircraft and the resulting inability to stop the Japanese invasion infuriated MacArthur. Arguing that the airmen were responsible, in large part, for his defeat in the Philippines, he fumed, "There never was a time in the Philippines when I gave the air force a mission that was carried out successfully."<sup>44</sup>

MacArthur was further dismayed by the condition of the air units he found on his arrival in Australia. He estimated it would take several months and an "intensive effort to reach a satisfactory condition."<sup>45</sup> The Japanese bombing raids on the

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<sup>42</sup> Potts, pp. 274-275; Paul P. Rogers, The Bitter Years: MacArthur and Sutherland (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), pp. 13-21.

<sup>43</sup> Major General Robert C. Richardson, "Memorandum for General MacArthur," 4 July 1942, p. 2, RG 4, MMMA. General Marshall sent Richardson on the trip to inspect American forces and inform MacArthur on strategic plans. Marshall papers, III: 200.

<sup>44</sup> Brett, "MacArthur," p. 143. A careful reconstruction of the fighter group in the Philipines confirms MacArthur's assessment about the performance of the air units, Bartsch, pp. 427-431.

<sup>45</sup> Message, MacArthur to Marshall, May 1, 1942, RG 4, MMMA; Also MacArthur to Marshall, March 21, 1942, Arnold Papers, LOC.



Australian mainland, in May, June, and July 1942, while not causing a great deal of physical damage, demonstrated the inability of the Allies to defend the Australian mainland against air attack.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the episode that most exemplified the combat problems of Brett's air units was the Battle of the Coral Sea which took place in early May 1942. To defend their newly conquered territories in the Pacific, the Japanese developed a defensive perimeter of island garrisons that enabled Japanese naval and air forces to control the sea and air. In late January 1942, Japanese commanders made plans to extend their defensive perimeter from Rabaul, a deep-water harbor located at the northeastern tip of New Britain, to the Solomon Islands and eastern New Guinea, actions that would cut off the sea lanes between the United States and Australia. The key objective in the eastern portion of New Guinea was Port Moresby.<sup>47</sup> In early May 1942, MacArthur's headquarters received intelligence about the Japanese plans for a seaborne invasion of Port Moresby. Brett planned to use his long range bombers as reconnaissance aircraft to find and attack the invasion force. Although some aircraft located the Japanese fleet on May 4 and 5, their sightings were not relayed to the United States Navy and a naval task force in the Coral Sea did not locate the Japanese fleet until May 7. Brett's aircraft took part in the actual battle, but were notably unsuccessful: less than half of the bombers reached their targets and those few that did inflicted only minimal damage.

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<sup>46</sup> John Hammond Moore, Over-Sexed, Over-Paid, and Over-Here: Americans in Australia 1941-1945 (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981), pp. 21-38; Gillson, pp. 527-530, 554-564.

<sup>47</sup> The Reports of MacArthur, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 2:124-125. Reports of MacArthur, 2: 126-131.; Weinberg, pp. 333-334.

Particularly embarrassing was the mistaken attack on a group of American and Australian cruisers and destroyers under the command of Admiral Sir John Crace of the Royal Australian Navy. Fortunately, none of the ships in Crace's force were hit by the friendly bombers, but Brett's failure to coordinate the reconnaissance of his aircraft with the naval commander did little to improve his standing with MacArthur.<sup>48</sup>

Brett's problems with MacArthur intensified after the poor showing in May. In early June MacArthur issued a sharp rebuke to Brett for giving an interview without obtaining prior approval.<sup>49</sup> Two weeks later Brett was reproached for the recent promotions to brigadier general of four air officers without MacArthur's approval.<sup>50</sup> At the same time MacArthur queried Brett about his having only 8 percent of the B-17s available for missions and the failure to attack Japanese airfields.<sup>51</sup> Brett told his commander that there were not enough parts available to fix the aircraft and the long

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<sup>48</sup> Craven and Cate, 1: 448-451; Gillson, pp. 513-524; James, Years, 2: 157-163; Spector, pp. 159-161. Even after fifty years there is still some confusion over this "friendly fire" incident. Most historians agree that the bombers came from the Australian base at Townsville, but offer dramatically different numbers. Gillson claims that 19 heavy bombers attacked; James, 3 B-26s; and Spector, 3 B-17s. Gillson, p. 522; James, Years, 2:160; Spector, p. 161. Craven and Cate mention that the 19th Group admitted to attacking friendly naval units; Craven and Cate, 1:450. If the 19th was involved, then the aircraft were B-17s, although the number is still unclear. Based on the availability of aircraft, its unlikely that there were 19 bombers. Hence Spector's account seems most accurate.

<sup>49</sup> Letter, MacArthur to Brett, June 1, 1942, Richard K. Sutherland Papers, RG 200, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>50</sup> Message, MacArthur to War Department, June 18, 1942, Arnold Papers, LOC.

<sup>51</sup> Letter, Sutherland to Commander Allied Air Forces, June 3, 1942, Subject: Operation of B-17E Aircraft; Letter, Sutherland to Commander Allied Air Forces, June 4, 1942, Subject: Attacks Against Hostile Bomber Concentration in New Britain; Letter, MacArthur to Commander Allied Air Forces, June 10, 1942, Subject: Attacks Against Hostile Bomber Conentration in New Britian, Sutherland Papers, NA.

distances to the targets exhausted both the aviators and the aircraft.<sup>52</sup> Although Brett had legitimate problems, MacArthur and his staff were unsympathetic. On one memo from Brett explaining his difficulties, MacArthur's chief of staff wrote: "This letter does not cover the point raised by this [headquarters]: that no attack had been made against the assigned objective, i.e. airplanes and air installations."<sup>53</sup>

Brett's actions had also attracted the attention of officers in Washington. In late June the War Department asked MacArthur why he did not have more aircraft ready for combat missions, suggesting that the cause might be his excessive emphasis on offensive operations.<sup>54</sup> MacArthur argued that offensive air operations were, in fact, necessary measures for stopping the Japanese build up of offensive air power. The problems in maintaining the aircraft were, MacArthur believed, Brett's fault.<sup>55</sup>

Brett's organization, which had put American air units under Australian commanders, also bothered officials in Washington. Although Marshall had suggested that MacArthur include officers from other nations on his headquarters staff, that was far different than having Americans actually under the command of foreign officers. The War Department Staff in Washington had been investigating the problems involved

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<sup>52</sup> Memo, Chief of Staff, Allied Air Forces to Chief of Staff, GHQ, June 5, 1942, Subject: Attacks Against Hostile Bomber Concentration in New Britain; Memo, Commander Allied Air Forces to Commander-in-Chief SWPA, June 11, 1942, Subject: Attacks Against Hostile Bomber Concentrations in New Britain, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>53</sup> Richard K. Sutherland, Typewritten note on page 1 of Memo, Commander Allied Air Forces to Commander-in-Chief SWPA, June 11, 1942, Subject: Attacks Against Hostile Bomber Concentrations in New Britain, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>54</sup> Message, War Department to USAFIA, June 23, 1942, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>55</sup> Message, MacArthur to Army Chief of Staff, June 26, 1942, Sutherland Papers, NA.

with mixing Australian and American forces, and Kenney was briefed on their ideas about the command reorganization before leaving for the Pacific.<sup>56</sup> According to Kenney, the Army Chief of Staff George Marshall "didn't think much of mixing nationalities in the same organization."<sup>57</sup> General Arnold was especially critical of allowing Australian ground commanders control over American aircraft. "The Australians," Arnold maintained, "have been operating our combat units in accordance with their doctrines and no attempt has been made on our part to gain control."<sup>58</sup>

While many of the problems in Australia, such as the lack of supplies, a paucity of trained staff officers, and ill-equipped aircraft, were not entirely Brett's fault, as the commander of the American air units he bore the brunt of the blame. MacArthur's reports to Washington had made his unhappiness with Brett clear. In May 1942 President Roosevelt sent a three man team to investigate conditions in Australia. When Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Anderson returned to Washington at the end of June he told Marshall that Brett had to be relieved. "As long as Brett is there, you won't have any cooperation between ground and air," he told Marshall, and "I don't think you plan to relieve General MacArthur."<sup>59</sup> On June 29, 1942, shortly after receiving MacArthur's

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<sup>56</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 53; Craven and Cate, IV:98; Horner, High Command, pp. 207-208.

<sup>57</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum For Assistant Chief of Staff From Arnold, July 28, 1942, RG 165, National Archives, quoted in Horner, High Command, p. 207.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, Samuel E. Anderson with Hugh N. Ahmann, June 28 to July 1, 1976, Santa Monica, California, p. 186, file 239.0512-905 HRA; Coffey, p. 271. The other members of the three man team were Lieutenant Colonel Francis R. Stevens and Lieutenant Commander Lyndon B. Johnson. Stevens was killed on a bombing mission on June 9 and Johnson and Anderson left for Washington on June 18. Robert A. Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson, vol. 2, Means of Ascent (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 33-45.

cable about Brett's inability to remedy the problems in maintaining aircraft, Marshall cabled MacArthur: "Desire your views and recommendations on possible replacement of Brett by [Lieutenant] General Frank Andrews."<sup>60</sup> MacArthur preferred Andrews to Brett and felt the change "would strengthen the air component."<sup>61</sup> Andrews, then the Commanding General in Panama, had no desire to work with MacArthur and, according to his aide, was incensed by the offer of a position that would have been, in effect, a demotion.<sup>62</sup> On July 6, Marshall told MacArthur that Andrews was unavailable, but offered either Brigadier General James H. Doolittle, "who had impressed all of us as an organizer, as a leader and as a dependable type," or Major General George Kenney "who is rated tops by General DeWitt [Kenney's immediate superior officer]."<sup>63</sup> MacArthur opted for Kenney because, he said, "it would be difficult to convince the Australians of Doolittle's acceptability."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Message, Marshall to MacArthur, June 29, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>61</sup> Message, MacArthur to Marshall, June 30, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>62</sup> Interview, Major General Thomas Darcy with Murray Green, Jupiter, Florida, May 31, 1970, Box 62, Murray Green Collection, Special Collections, United States Air Force Academy Library, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado; Copp, Forged, pp. 270-271; Copp, Few Great Captains, pp. 305-307.

<sup>63</sup> Message, Marshall to MacArthur, July 6, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>64</sup> Message, MacArthur to Marshall, July 7, 1942, RG 4 MMMA; July 11, 1942, KP. James, Years, 2: 197, argues that the impetus for the relief came from MacArthur rather than Marshall, but the action seems to have been a mutual decision.

## Kenney Arrives

After his meetings in Washington, Kenney briefly returned to his old headquarters in San Francisco before departing for the Southwest Pacific on July 18, 1942.<sup>65</sup> When he arrived in Australia ten days later, Kenney met with MacArthur's chief of staff and listened to him lambaste the air force. In his initial meeting with MacArthur the next morning, Kenney heard much of the same. MacArthur lectured about the poor bombing of the air force, the lack of discipline, and concluded by noting that, as far as he was concerned, their accomplishments to date did not "justify all the boasting the Air Force had been indulging in for years."<sup>66</sup> MacArthur also sensed disloyalty among the airmen, to his mind the most damning indictment, for nothing was more important to MacArthur than loyalty. According to Kenney, MacArthur "would not stand for disloyalty. He demanded loyalty from me and everyone in the Air Force or he would get rid of them."<sup>67</sup>

Some of the hostility airmen felt towards MacArthur came from their perception of his opposition to air power. In 1925 MacArthur had been a judge on Billy Mitchell's court martial and, according to Kenney, many airmen resented MacArthur for Mitchell's guilty verdict.<sup>68</sup> Later, during MacArthur's tenure as the Army chief of staff from 1930 to 1935, he clashed often and vigorously with airmen and their

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<sup>65</sup> Kenney diary, July 15, 18, 1942, KP.

<sup>66</sup> Kenney, Reports, 28-29; Kenney diary, July 29, 1942, KP.

<sup>67</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> MacArthur, 85-86; James, Years, 1:306-311; George C. Kenney, The MacArthur I Know (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951), pp. 21-22.

Congressional supporters over the budgetary priorities for aircraft and the continuing quest for an independent air force. While MacArthur had sound reasons for his decision to limit spending on aircraft, airmen of the time believed that he neither appreciated nor understood the value of aviation.<sup>69</sup> Brett maintained that MacArthur's distrust of the air force stemmed from his "inability to understand it or operate it as he would ground troops."<sup>70</sup>

MacArthur may not have been as well versed in aviation as airmen would have liked, but he was aware of its potential contribution to warfare. In 1920, while Superintendent at West Point, MacArthur had invited Mitchell to speak to the Corps of Cadets on the air war in France and as the Army chief of staff he had overseen the establishment of the first independent air headquarters.<sup>71</sup> More importantly, MacArthur's experiences in the first few months of the war had graphically demonstrated the importance of air power and the handicap he would operate under without a strong air force.

Undoubtedly, Kenney was aware of Brett's poor personal relationship with MacArthur. General Arnold later wrote: "Brett should have done the 'getting along' since he was junior" an outlook he surely passed on to Kenney.<sup>72</sup> According to Brett, when Kenney arrived he "knew he had to get off on the right foot with MacArthur, or

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<sup>69</sup> James, Years, 1: 354-363, 369-371, 378-381, 458-461; Shiner, Foulois, p. 260.

<sup>70</sup> Brett, "MacArthur," p. 144. "Comments of Gen. Brett," KP.

<sup>71</sup> James, Years, 2:274-275; Shiner, Foulois, pp. 193-211, 256-265.

<sup>72</sup> Arnold, p. 331.

his life would be very unhappy."<sup>73</sup> After listening to MacArthur vent his displeasure during their initial meeting, Kenney pledged his loyalty to his new chief. Never lacking in self-confidence, Kenney bluntly told MacArthur that he "knew how to run an air force as well or better than anyone else" and with MacArthur's backing Kenney promised to change things and "produce results."<sup>74</sup> From Kenney's perspective he knew "from the beginning that there were two important bits of salesmanship that had to be put over, if the Air Force was to play the role it was capable of. I had to sell myself to the General and I had to sell him to the kids."<sup>75</sup>

An important part of "selling himself" to MacArthur was proving his worth as an air commander and that began by making changes that improve the combat effectiveness of the air arm. Even before arriving in Australia, Kenney had a good idea of the things he would have to change to produce results. His meetings in Washington convinced Kenney that he should focus his initial efforts on increasing the number of working combat aircraft, improving the morale of the air and ground crews, and recruiting better officers and commanders.<sup>76</sup>

Kenney was sure that one of the biggest problems in the command was the quality of officers and he attempted to correct this deficiency before leaving Washington. He told Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall and the Army Air

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<sup>73</sup> Brett, "MacArthur," p. 149.

<sup>74</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 88.

<sup>76</sup> Kenney diary, July 12, 13, 14, 1942, KP.



Forces Commanding General Hap Arnold that "no one could get anything done with the collection of generals" given to Brett and that he "intended to get rid of a lot of the Air Corps dead wood."<sup>77</sup> Although Kenney's demands angered Marshall and Arnold, they agreed to his requests and Kenney made arrangements to have Brett's top commanders sent home.<sup>78</sup>

Brett was not unaware of the deficiencies of these men. He knew, for example, that one of his key officers had difficulty getting away from routine, while another "should really be pulled out and put on an administrative job."<sup>79</sup> Commenting on a third general, Brett complained that this officer, "had been sent here to get him out of the United States, in the same way as many other men had been sent to me."<sup>80</sup>

Kenney's efforts in Washington allowed him to start eliminating those generals who were not capable of leadership in a combat command. Brett's problems with the officer corps must have been noticeable because some changes had started prior to Kenney's instigation. While in Washington he learned that two officers he greatly respected, Brigadier General Ennis C. Whitehead and Brigadier General Kenneth L. Walker, had already been sent to the area.<sup>81</sup> Kenney had known these officers for over

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<sup>77</sup> Kenney diary, July 12, 1942, KP.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Kenney gives the impression in his book that these changes were made after his arrival, but according to his diary he knew that Major Generals Lincoln and Royce, and Brigadier Generals Perrin, Sneed, and Scanlon were not the type of officers he wanted in the command and their leaving the Southwest Pacific was agreed to before Kenney left the United States. Kenney, Reports, pp. 11, 40, 44, 99, 115, 125.

<sup>79</sup> "Comments of General Brett," KP

<sup>80</sup> "Comments of General Brett," KP.

<sup>81</sup> Kenney diary, July 12, 1942, KP; Message MacArthur to Chief of Staff War Department, May 24, 1942, Sutherland Papers, NA.

twenty years and believed that "If Brett had had them about three months earlier, his luck might have been better."<sup>82</sup>

Whitehead was, like Kenney, a long time aviator. He had entered the Army in 1917, completed pilot training in the fall, and sailed to France on the same day as George Kenney--November 14, 1917. Although both were at the advanced instruction center at Issoudan together, how well they knew each other during that time is unclear. After pursuit training Whitehead stayed at Issoudan testing French aircraft and teaching new students. His lengthy tour meant that Whitehead did not experience combat in France. After a brief discharge from the army upon his return to the United States, Whitehead decided to remain in the service and had a number of interesting assignments in the years between the wars: he flew in the bombing tests with Billy Mitchell against the captured German battleship Ostfriesland; was selected to participate in a goodwill flight to South America; and worked in the intelligence division of the Army General Staff. Like Kenney, Whitehead also attended the Air Service Engineering School, graduating first in his class in 1926. Kenney and Whitehead met again in 1930 at the Air Corps Tactical School, Whitehead's student year was Kenney's last year as an instructor. They met again in 1935 on the staff of the GHQ Air Force.<sup>83</sup> Kenney had great respect for Whitehead, describing him as "A

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<sup>82</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Donald M. Goldstein, "Ennis C. Whitehead: Aerial Tactician," in We Shall Return, pp. 178-181; Donald M. Goldstein, "Ennis C. Whitehead, Aerospace Commander and Pioneer," Ph.d. Dissertation, University of Denver, 1970, pp. 15-23, 30-48, 57, 69-71; Finney, pp. 102-103; 120-121.

great leader and aviator . . . who planned every operation down to the last detail to insure success. "<sup>84</sup>

Ken Walker was not of the same mold as Kenney and Whitehead. Kenney met Walker at the Air Corps Tactical School in 1928 when Walker was a student. After graduation Walker stayed on as an instructor in the bombardment section, putting him and Kenney on the faculty together for two years.<sup>85</sup> Walker's interest in bombers, and work on improving the precision of the Air Corps' bombing, convinced him that high altitude attacks were more accurate and effective than bombing from low altitudes.<sup>86</sup> This view put him in direct opposition to Kenney's belief, honed as an attack instructor, in the efficacy of low altitude bombing. Walker was also wedded to the idea that superior speed and armament would protect bombers from attacking aircraft when they entered enemy airspace, so that there was no need to attack or eliminate the enemy air defenses. Walker believed that "a well organized, well planned, and well flown air force attack will constitute an offensive that cannot be stopped."<sup>87</sup>

Although Kenney respected Walker as an aviator and officer, and valued him as a combat leader, he never developed the same close relationship as he had with Whitehead. It may have been Walker's belief in high altitude attacks and Kenney's faith in low altitude bombing that put the two at odds. Or it could have simply been

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<sup>84</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup> Finney, pp. 102-103, 118-119.

<sup>86</sup> McFarland, pp. 84-88.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Futrell, Ideas, p. 64.

that the personal chemistry between the two men was poor. Whatever the reason, the two men disagreed often during the first few months of the war. While Kenney described Walker as a harder worker, he also found his subordinate "stubborn, oversensitive, and a prima donna" afraid to delegate authority.<sup>88</sup> Despite his faults Walker was a well-respected officer and, whatever the personal or professional disagreements, Kenney was glad to have him.

In addition to Walker and Whitehead, another of Kenney's important officers was Brigadier General Donald Wilson, sent to Australia soon after Kenney's arrival to be chief of staff for the Allied Air Forces.<sup>89</sup> Wilson joined the Army as an infantry soldier, but later transferred to the Air Service and became a pilot. Much of Wilson's career, however, was spent at the Air Corps Tactical School. He was a student in the Class of 1931 and then was an instructor for seven out of the next nine years. He became known within the the Air Corps for the work he did on strategic bombing theory while at the Tactical School.<sup>90</sup> Before attending the Tactical School as a student, Wilson was assigned to the School in a division which did work on the correspondence courses. Kenney first met Wilson during this period and Wilson subsequently took over Kenney's role in teaching the course on observation aircraft.

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<sup>88</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 143.

<sup>89</sup> September 15, 18, 1942, KP; Wilson, pp. 254-255.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson, pp. 120-180, 236-241. For more details on Wilson's contribution to strategic bombing theory see, Donald Wilson, "Origin of a Theory for Air Strategy," Aerospace Historian 18 (March 1971): 19-25.

Kenney would rely on these men, and many more, in the coming months to produce the results he had promised MacArthur. They typified the type of officer Kenney wanted in his command. He termed them "operators"--aggressive, energetic people concerned foremost with getting on with the war.<sup>91</sup> Kenney expounded on his views about officership in a letter he wrote to Arnold later in the war. Arnold had asked for Kenney's recommendations on which senior brigadier generals and colonels should be retired. Kenney based his assessment on the ability of the officers to do the assigned job with enthusiasm, drive, and leadership, ideals no less important for himself than for others. Perhaps unconsciously reflecting the lessons he learned as a young entrepreneur, he believed that an important facet of leadership was the readiness to make decisions and accept the risk of being wrong. "The cry that the Army is full of red tape is a cry against the people in the Army who just don't seem to get results, who can't make decisions," Kenney wrote.<sup>92</sup> He believed that this type of individual was harmful to the organization no matter what position he held:

The mediocre man does not get ships sunk or planes shot down and unfortunately neither does he get air crews and ground crews trained on time nor supplies forwarded to the proper place on time. His depot does not produce results. Even as a staff man he bottlenecks studies and decisions that are vital to the operating forces.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, May 1, 1943, KP.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Although Arnold specifically asked for recommendations about older officers, one of the men Kenney recommended for retirement was Brigadier General Elwood "Pete" Quesada, one of the youngest general officers in the Army Air Forces. Why Kenney would make this assessment of Quesada is unclear. For more details on Quesada's career see, Thomas Alexander Hughes, Overlord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

Not surprisingly, any officer that fit this description quickly left the southwest Pacific.

Kenney's hunch about the officers in the command was confirmed when he arrived in Australia. One, he felt, "will never realize that we are at war."<sup>94</sup> While another did not know what was going on during the combat operations.<sup>95</sup> Kenney was ruthless in purging those who did not match his energy or sense of commitment. When a supply officer complained about combat units not completing their paperwork properly he was quickly sent back to the United States.<sup>96</sup> Kenney later boasted that in addition to the general officers he dismissed, he also sent home "about forty colonels and lieutenant colonels and one captain."<sup>97</sup> His attitude toward the officers who failed to meet his standards was captured in his answer to a request about suggestions for future assignments regarding a lieutenant colonel and major shipped back from Australia. Kenney replied, "Have no recommendation for assignment . . . unless you have vacancies for police and prison officers. Neither of them is of any use to the Fifth Air Force."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kenney diary, September 4, 1942, KP.

<sup>95</sup> Kenney diary, July 30, 1942, KP.

<sup>96</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 56.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Wolk, "Innovator," p. 138.

<sup>98</sup> Message, Commanding General 5th Air Force to Commanding General Army Air Forces, October 25, 1942, KP.

## Organizational Changes

After his initial meeting with MacArthur, Kenney made a rapid inspection trip of the air bases. He flew to the bomber base at Townsville in Australia and then on to the most advanced allied air base at Port Moresby in New Guinea. Kenney ascertained that changes were needed in a number of areas. "One thing was certain," Kenney later wrote confidently, "No matter what I accomplished, it would be an improvement. It couldn't be much worse."<sup>99</sup> As he set about reforming his organization, Kenney was a bundle of energy. He inspected and made changes in virtually every area in the command from airdrome construction and maintenance procedures to combat tactics and bomb loads, to strategy, morale, and organization.

Kenney's organizational changes reflected his efforts both to enhance the combat effectiveness of his new command and to conform with MacArthur's desire to reduce Australian control. He found his first challenge in the headquarters of the Allied Air Forces. The headquarters had been set up using the Australian directorate system. Under this system officers in charge of a section of the headquarters staff issued orders under the commander's name, which was not only confusing to the troops in the field, but also reduced the commander's control over the staff. With the large presence of Australians in the headquarters, this system added to the perception that Australians were commanding American forces. Although Kenney found the directorate system at the headquarters of the Allied Air Forces "too complicated,"<sup>100</sup> he

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<sup>99</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> Kenney diary, July 29, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 32-33, 47

made no changes to it and continued Brett's policy of having both Australians and Americans in the headquarters. He did, however, modify procedures and reduced the ability of staff officers to send out orders for the commander. In addition, he strengthened his authority by making himself both the commander and the chief of staff until an American officer could take over that position.<sup>101</sup>

The power of the Allied Air Forces headquarters was also reduced through the establishment of a separate and distinct American air force. In early September Kenney divided the Allied Air Force into the American Fifth Air Force, commanded by Kenney, and the Australian RAAF Command, Allied Air Forces, headed by Bostock, Brett's former chief of staff. While these two organizations were separated along national lines, an important step in earning MacArthur's trust, the retention of the Allied chain of command also allowed a geographical division of responsibilities which improved the combat ability of the entire force. Fifth Air Force was designated the offensive arm and was allocated responsibility over air operations in New Guinea and controlled all of the air units, American or Australian assigned to that area. Likewise the RAAF Command was made responsible for the air defense of Australia, anti-submarine duties, and bombing missions from northwestern Australia and assigned missions to all of the units in this area of operations, including an American fighter group and bombardment squadron at Darwin.<sup>102</sup> Although Kenney took credit for

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<sup>101</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 47.

<sup>102</sup> Kenney diary, August 9, 1942, September 6, 1942, KP; Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, General Order Number 62, November 8, 1942, file 706.193 HRA. The Australian component was initially called Coastal Defense Command, but this appellation lasted only 2 weeks. Gillison, pp. 585-598; George Odgers, Air War Against Japan, 1943-1945 (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957; reprinted 1968), p. 8.



devising this separation, the War Department Staff in Washington had been investigating the problems involved with mixing Australian and American forces, and Kenney was briefed on their ideas about the command reorganization before leaving for the Pacific.<sup>103</sup> Kenney's role was to implement this division without losing any combat effectiveness.

While this reorganization appealed to the American military, it was not without its problems, especially in the Australian Air Force. When Brett initially established the Allied Air Forces, his intent "was to have one Allied Air Force commander who would be completely in command of all Air Force tactical as well as maintenance and supply units."<sup>104</sup> Brett and the RAAF Chief of Staff believed that having one commander responsible for all aspects of air operations would be the most efficient for combat. Their arguments, however, held little sway with either the Australian Prime Minister John Curtin or his Minister for Air, A. S. Drakeford. Neither of these political leaders was overly enamored with arguments that rested solely on military efficiency. Rather, they were concerned that the effect of this organizational structure would be a loss of control over the employment of their national forces. As a result, the Allied Air Forces commander was given control of RAAF units for combat operations, but no authority over their maintenance procedures, supplies, or personnel practices.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 53; Craven and Cate, IV:98.

<sup>104</sup> Brett Report, Summary Q, p. 1; "Comments of General Brett."

<sup>105</sup> Gillson, pp. 473-477; Horner, High Command, pp. 350-353.

After learning of Kenney's intent to split the Allied Air Forces, the new Chief of Staff for the Royal Australian Air Force, Air Vice Marshal George Jones, who was not the one who made the previous arrangement with Brett, argued that Kenney's new command arrangements abrogated previous agreements concerning the Australian air force. Jones rightly claimed that the old Allied Air Forces structure had resulted in a division between combat operations and administrative and logistical support of RAAF units, a split which adversely affected the combat capability of the RAAF. In Jones's opinion, Kenney's reorganization afforded an opportunity to unify the RAAF contribution. Instead of putting combat operations under Bostock and the RAAF Command, Jones maintained that there should be only one RAAF officer accountable for Australian air operations, and, as the Chief of Staff, Jones felt that he should be given responsibility for combat operations.<sup>106</sup> Whatever the merits of Jones's argument, both Bostock and Kenney were reluctant to relinquish control over the Australian forces assigned for combat operations.

Although unable to resolve the organizational issue immediately, Jones was not deterred and continued his efforts throughout Kenney's first months in command. In November 1942 he wrote to Bostock and claimed that Kenney made the organizational changes without consulting Australian officials which, he contended, voided the changes. Jones reasserted his proposal to combine the RAAF Command under the headquarters of the RAAF.<sup>107</sup> Although Jones's charge about Kenney's unilateral

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<sup>106</sup> Kenney diary, August 23, 1942, KP; Gillson, pp. 587-596.

<sup>107</sup> Letter, Jones to Bostock, November 20, 1942, RG4 MMMA.

action was correct, Bostock replied by citing Jones's refusal to assign officers to the RAAF Command or recognize the new organization and the resulting inability of RAAF Command to carry out combat operations.<sup>108</sup> Jones, Bostock maintained, misconstrued the entire situation and presented the current organization as "complicated and impractical," a charge which was unfounded.<sup>109</sup> Bostock advanced his solution of consolidating administrative and operational authority under RAAF Command, thereby limiting Jones's role. In January 1943 the chiefs of the Australian military met to resolve the dispute over the organization of the RAAF. They were, however, unable to come to a solution and only agreed to defer the decision pending a further review.<sup>110</sup>

While the controversy over the command of Australian air units was driven by differing ideas about how best to achieve military effectiveness, there was also a personal component to this battle. In fact, Kenney felt that personal feelings were, at bottom, the cause of the problems.<sup>111</sup> The feud between Bostock and Jones began in early 1942 when Air Chief Marshal Burnett stepped down as the Chief of the Australian Air Staff. Burnett favored Bostock as his replacement. Since Bostock was then serving as the deputy chief of the air staff, he was considered by many to be the most logical choice. However, both the prime minister and the minister for air

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<sup>108</sup> Letter, Bostock to Secretary, Air Board, December 12, 1942; Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock, "RAAF Command-Organization," January 3, 1943, p. 1, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>109</sup> Letter, Bostock to Secretary, Air Board, December 12, 1942, RG 4 MMMA.

<sup>110</sup> Minutes, Australian Defence Committee, January 7, 1943, RG4, MMMA.

<sup>111</sup> Kenney diary, August 23, September 21, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 80.

distrusted Bostock and promoted Jones over eight senior officers to the post.<sup>112</sup> The enmity between Jones and Bostock, and the debates over the control of the RAAF, would be a source of continuing strife throughout the war. Kenney termed these problems a "nuisance," but since they did not affect combat operations and he was content with Bostock as the RAAF combat commander, Kenney never felt the need to change.<sup>113</sup> But he never attempted to resolve the problem.

As he was considering the needed organizational changes at the Allied Air Forces level, Kenney continued his inspection trip of air bases and discovered a number of other problems which pointed toward the need for further change. Aircraft flying from the Allied air base at Port Moresby in New Guinea were going on combat missions whenever available rather than being concentrated into combat formations. No formation leader was assigned for the missions, the crews had no idea of proper tactics, and they were given only a general target area, rather than precise aiming points. In addition, it was rumored that whenever the poorly trained bomber crews saw a Japanese fighter, they jettisoned their bombs and returned to base. Thus, even if a large number of aircraft had been available, the number which actually hit the target and caused any significant damage was small.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> "Comments of General Brett"; Alan Stephens, Power Plus Attitude: Ideas, Strategy and Doctrine in the Royal Australian Air Force, 1921-1991 (Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1992), p. 64; Hewitt, p. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 80.

<sup>114</sup> Kenney diary, July 30, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 35-38.

After viewing the problems in New Guinea, Kenney told Whitehead to disregard any previous orders and stay in Port Moresby. Kenney wanted Whitehead to be the commander of a forward combat headquarters, later named 5th Advanced Echelon, that would be in charge of combat operations in the forward area.<sup>115</sup> This somewhat unusual step had no precedent in pre-war American air doctrine. Kenney was forced to make this move for a number of reasons. The lack of firm leadership on the spot was evident by the inept flying operations that Kenney had just witnessed, yet he felt that in his role as the Allied Air Forces commander he had to stay in Brisbane to plan and coordinate operations with MacArthur and the land and naval commanders. Because of the difficulty in communicating from Australia, he needed someone at Port Moresby whose leadership and ability he could trust to oversee operations and provide American control of the missions. "Fifth Advon" was the answer.

This organizational structure allowed Whitehead to concentrate on controlling individual combat missions and improving the air defenses at the New Guinea airfields. When aircraft arrived in New Guinea, they were given fuel, some minor servicing, and ammunition; any extensive repairs were left until the aircraft arrived back at its main base in Australia. Whitehead had the authority to change previously assigned missions based on weather, new intelligence, or the number of aircraft available. Furthermore, since Whitehead worked directly with the ground commanders in New Guinea, he could send flights to support the ground forces on short notice. In short, Whitehead's control over the day-to-day combat operations gave to air units much needed flexibility

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<sup>115</sup> Kenney diary, July 30, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 35-36, 38, 41.

to respond quickly to changing situations. It also left Kenney free to concentrate on a myriad of other activities such as planning future operations, improving training and morale, and finding ways to keep the aircraft flying.<sup>116</sup>

With Whitehead as the on-scene air commander, Fifth Air Force functioned along more traditional lines and included a Fifth Bomber Command, Fifth Fighter Command, and a Fifth Air Service Command. The bomber command, led by Brigadier General Kenneth Walker, and the fighter command, under Colonel Paul B. "Squeeze" Wurtsmith, provided the administrative framework for the combat units. While Walker was a known commodity to Kenney, he had never met Wurtsmith before, but had heard that the young colonel was an "excellent" commander.<sup>117</sup> Fifth Fighter and Bomber Command received the new aircrews when they arrived in the theater, assigned them to units, trained them, and took care of other administrative matters. These commands also provided the mechanics and ground crews who serviced the aircraft, performed inspections, and accomplished the routine repair work.<sup>118</sup> In essence, they provided the means by which Fifth Advon carried out combat operations. Extensive repairs, engine overhauls, modifications to the aircraft, and theater-wide supply problems were handled by the Air Services Command, initially commanded by

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<sup>116</sup> Kenney diary, August 5, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 78-79; Headquarters Allied Air Force, General Order number 63, November 11, 1942, file 706.193 HRA.

<sup>117</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 64.

<sup>118</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:99; Official Guide, pp. 19-26, 199.

Major General Rush B. Lincoln, but in October 1942 taken over by Brigadier General Carl W. Connell.<sup>119</sup>

To fulfill the combat requirements in the Southwest Pacific, Kenney had to devote a substantial amount of time, effort, and resources during this period to establishing an effective aircraft maintenance organization. While the number of aircraft sent to the theater in 1942 was impressive on paper, in reality Allied combat strength was woefully lacking--in Kenney's words "appalling."<sup>120</sup> On his arrival, less than 50 percent of the total aircraft in the theater were available for combat operations, and in some categories the situation was even worse: of the 245 fighters in the American inventory, only 70 were combat-ready.<sup>121</sup> Keeping aircraft in good condition meant solving a host of problems. Most of the airfields were not hard-surfaced and in poor condition, which caused damage to aircraft when they took off or landed. The high humidity in New Guinea corroded metal parts and wires, and aircraft mechanics discovered that the engine oil sent from the United States evaporated in the high temperatures of the tropics. When aircraft were damaged there were often no supplies available to make the necessary repairs.<sup>122</sup>

Kenney began a systematic effort to solve the problems and get more aircraft in the air. He discovered that the main supply area was located at Tocumwal near

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<sup>119</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:99, 103; Official Guide, pp. 178-179, 199.

<sup>120</sup> Kenney diary, August 1, 1942, KP.

<sup>121</sup> Kenney diary, August 1, 1942; Kenney, Reports, pp. 42-43; Gillison, pp. 574-575; Craven, and Cate, IV: 8-10.

<sup>122</sup> Williams, pp. 40-43; Craven and Cate, 4:101.

Melbourne, Australia, almost 2500 miles away from where the supplies were needed at Port Moresby. While this distance alone presented a challenge to getting the equipment where it was needed, the rudimentary Australian transportation network exacerbated the problem. One of MacArthur's staff officers told a fellow officer: "The whole continent of Australia is as undeveloped as the central United States was before the Civil War."<sup>123</sup> The five states in Australia had each developed its own rail system, resulting in five different gauges of track. At each state border supplies had to be off-loaded and transferred to another train. Many of the railroads were single track and equipped with antiquated engines.<sup>124</sup> Lieutenant Wayne Rothgeb recorded his impressions of a train trip he took in January 1943. "From the train's speed," he quipped, "I don't think its wheels had turned in twenty-five years." After thirty-six hours the train stopped, "We had gone thirty-six miles."<sup>125</sup> To overcome the maddeningly slow train travel and the lack of roads, large quantities of aviation fuel and supplies were sent by ship, but this too was a slow process. Air transportation was quicker, but the amount that could be moved was small and the number of transport aircraft involved in ferrying supplies to combat operations prohibited their use on a regular basis.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Letter, Stephen J. Chamberlin to Brigadier General Brehon Somervell, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, War Department, February 26, 1942, Stephen J. Chamberlin Papers, MHI.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, pp. 33-37.

<sup>125</sup> Wayne P. Rothgeb, New Guinea Skies: A Fighter Pilot's View of World War II, (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1992), pp. 103-104.

<sup>126</sup> Williams, pp. 97-100; Craven and Cate, 4:8-10



Kenney instituted a number of changes to increase the availability of aircraft for combat. Although the Tocumwal depot was an incredible facility--71 miles of roads, a 900 foot railway platform, and a 300,000 gallon concrete water tank, built with considerable effort and expense (over \$3.5 million)--Kenney shut it down and ordered the people and supplies moved to the north. In addition, he established an advanced supply headquarters at Port Moresby and instituted around the clock work schedules at the rear area repair facilities.<sup>127</sup> He sacked the head of the air force services organization and put an old acquaintance and former vice president of Douglas Aircraft, Major Victor E. Bertrandias, in charge of a new aircraft repair facility at Townsville.<sup>128</sup> Kenney also tightened the reporting requirements from units about the status of aircraft. According to Kenney, Brett did not know how many aircraft he had to work with, making it impossible to plan future missions.<sup>129</sup> Henceforth, flying units forwarded a report each evening to Kenney's headquarters about the condition of their aircraft, giving him a least a baseline from which to conduct planning.<sup>130</sup>

While changes at the upper levels of the command were important, Kenney understood that producing results depended on motivating the people responsible for supplying and fixing the aircraft. The lack of military decorations and medals, which

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<sup>127</sup> Kenney diary, August 15, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 78-79; Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters Army Forces, Pacific, Engineers of the Southwest Pacific, 1941-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950-1952), vol. 6, Airfield and Air Base Development, pp. 63-64.

<sup>128</sup> Kenney diary, August 28, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 86.

<sup>129</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 45, 61.

<sup>130</sup> Kenney diary, August 21, 1942, KP.

in many cases represented the only kind of official recognition a person was likely to receive, heightened the sense of isolation of many airmen in Australia. Kenney, with MacArthur's approval, instituted a more liberal policy for decorations and awarding medals. "I knew that little bits of pretty ribbon had helped in World War I: maybe they would help in this one, too," he explained.<sup>131</sup> When offered 100 Bulova watches for the pilots, Kenney told Arde Bulova that he would prefer to give them to the mechanics who worked on the aircraft instead.<sup>132</sup> Kenney also made it a point to visit the various air bases in his command to discover for himself what was going on.<sup>133</sup> He found the living and working conditions on the air bases in New Guinea intolerable and began efforts to improve conditions in the forward areas by flying in fresh food and refrigerators and installing screens and cement floors in the dining halls.<sup>134</sup>

Technically, Kenney was not authorized to do this; the supply of food was regulated by another organization, but to his mind they were not doing an adequate job. Kenney felt it was his responsibility: "Those kids of mine had to be fed properly."<sup>135</sup> While none of these things that Kenney did was out of the ordinary, they represented an improvement. One pilot felt Kenney improved morale because "we started to get some

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<sup>131</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 43, 52.

<sup>132</sup> Kenney interview with Hasdorff, p. 52; Kenney interview with James, p. 44; Kenney, Reports, p. 215. Kenney presented some of the watches on September 30, 1943. George C. Kenney Scrapbook, file 168.7103-69 HRA.

<sup>133</sup> General Richard H. Ellis, interview with Maurice Maryanow, August 17-21, 1987, Washington, D.C., pp. 53-54, 116-117, file K239.0512-740 HRA. Ellis flew in the southwest Pacific and served as a group commander. He later went on to be the commander of Strategic Air Command.

<sup>134</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 74-75.

<sup>135</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 194.

true indication that people really knew we were even down in the Southwest Pacific and fighting."<sup>136</sup>

While Kenney boosted spirits among the members of his command, he also went to work trying to get some more aircraft to bring MacArthur results. Although warned by General Arnold before leaving the United States not to expect any more aircraft, Kenney, shortly after he arrived in Australia, began pestering Arnold for more planes. Arnold remained convinced, however, that the European theater must have first priority and told Kenney that his forces would remain at a level of "sufficient strength to enable you to support yourself defensively and to carry out a limited offensive against the Japanese."<sup>137</sup>

Even when new or replacement aircraft arrived they were inevitably accompanied by problems and as a commander Kenney continually pushed for solutions. The first of the fifty P-38s, which Kenney requested when leaving the United States, arrived in late August 1942. Kenney had contracted with the Australians to manufacture 10,000 150 gallon droppable fuel tanks to increase the range of the aircraft, but before the aircraft could get into combat, maintenance crews discovered that the fuel tanks were leaking and had to be repaired..<sup>138</sup> The second group of P-38s arrived missing parts to their guns and later developed leaks in their engine cooling systems. Six replacements B-25s arrived without gun mounts, guns, or bombsights,

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<sup>136</sup> Lieutenant Walter A. Krell, quoted in Martin Caidin, The Ragged, Rugged Warriors (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 343.

<sup>137</sup> Letter Arnold to Kenney, 6 December 1942, KP.

<sup>138</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 73.

making them almost useless in combat.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, when new B-24 aircraft arrived in Australia, defective parts kept them out of combat operations for a month. The results of the first missions after the repairs, however, were disastrous: out of the first eighteen flights, 5 planes and 3 crews were lost. Kenney immediately pulled the group out of combat and began remedial training.<sup>140</sup>

### **MacArthur's headquarters**

As Kenney wrestled with a variety of operational and supply problems and reorganized the structure of the air command, he also worked to establish better relations with MacArthur and his headquarters. Kenney had been warned about the potential difficulties he might face in working with MacArthur's staff before leaving for Australia. General Marshall warned "of personality clashes that undoubtedly were causing a lot of trouble."<sup>141</sup> One of the most divisive disputes was between MacArthur's chief of staff, Major General Richard K. Sutherland, and General Brett. Sutherland, a Yale graduate who joined the Army in 1916, was an intelligent, arrogant officer, noted both for his brilliance and his intense loyalty to MacArthur along with an ability to antagonize other individuals in the command with his vindictive and unscrupulous behavior.<sup>142</sup> Although technically just MacArthur's chief of staff

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<sup>139</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 90, 120.

<sup>140</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, November 27, 1942, KP; October 22, December 10, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 126, 129, 141.

<sup>141</sup> Kenney diary, July 12, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Kenney interview with James, p. 5; James, Years, 2: 77-78; Chwilakowski, pp. 67-68.

Sutherland, who had served with MacArthur in the Philippines since 1938, in reality functioned as the deputy commander and assumed many of the responsibilities that normally fell to the commander.<sup>143</sup>

Prior to Kenney's arrival, Sutherland had been especially influential in air matters and frequently interfered in air operations. Lewis Brereton, the air commander in the Philippines, rarely spoke with MacArthur, dealing mostly with Sutherland instead.<sup>144</sup> Brett told Kenney that "he had so much trouble getting past Sutherland to see MacArthur that he hadn't seen the General for weeks and . . . just talked to Sutherland on the telephone when he had to."<sup>145</sup> Brett described Sutherland as "an egotist with a smattering of knowledge pertaining to air matters," and "a bully, who, should he lose his ability to say 'by order of General MacArthur' would be practically a nobody." Brett recommended "a show-down early in the game with Sutherland."<sup>146</sup>

Kenney first met Sutherland in 1933 when the two were classmates at the Army War College. In fact, the two worked together for several weeks on one of the committee projects. This experience probably gave Kenney some insight into Sutherland's personality and how to best to get along with him.<sup>147</sup> Kenney also suspected that Sutherland considered himself something of an air expert because of his

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<sup>143</sup> James, Years, I: 565-567; 2: 77-78; Paul P. Rogers, The Good Years: MacArthur and Sutherland, (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 36-40, 231-232.

<sup>144</sup> Brereton, pp. 17-67.

<sup>145</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 33.

<sup>146</sup> "Comments of Brett."

<sup>147</sup> Report of Committee Number 3, "Tactical Doctrines, 26 September 1932, p. 1, Curricular Archives of the Army War College, MHI.

flying experience, leading Kenney to conclude that he would have to remind the chief of staff "that I was the one that had the answers to questions dealing with the Air Force."<sup>148</sup> Sutherland's flying experiences were, in fact, fairly considerable. He learned to fly in 1940 at the Philippine Army Training Center under Air Corps instructors following the standard service requirements for pilot training. In addition he had been awarded a private pilot's license by the Civil Aeronautics Administration. While Sutherland had not received an official pilot's rating from the Army, he continued to fly regularly as a pilot or copilot during the war.<sup>149</sup>

More important, however, was Sutherland's perception of his own air prowess. In March 1943, Sutherland asked to be formally recognized as an army pilot. He had 300 hours of flying time and wanted to be designated a "service pilot," a rating that allowed pilots to perform non-combat duties such as ferrying aircraft, giving flight instruction, or towing targets. Because Sutherland was over the age limit and not performing a duty commensurate with the rating, the request was denied. In his letter to Sutherland explaining the decision, General Arnold graciously stated, "With full knowledge of the grand job you are doing I cannot but help feel that this rating would not materially alter your position."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 27; James, Years, 2:13.

<sup>149</sup> Letter, Richard K. Sutherland to Commanding General Army Air Forces, Subject: Rating, March 28, 1943, KP.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. The staff officer writing the memorandum was more forthright than Arnold: "The granting of the rating of service pilot to General Sutherland would not impress younger combat personnel. They realize that the service pilot is not a combat flying officer and that he is ineligible to command flying units. The only advantage to be gained by granting General Sutherland the rating he requests would be those of a personal nature to General Sutherland." Memorandum for the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Subj: Rating of Service Pilot for Major General Sutherland, p. 2, n.d. [April 1943]. Letter, General Arnold to Major General Sutherland, April 17, 1943, KP; Official Army Air

Besides Sutherland's knowledge of flying, his proximity to the air headquarters made it relatively easy for him to interfere with the air commanders. Mission orders were transmitted from the Allied Air Forces headquarters, located in the same building with MacArthur's headquarters, to the units at the outlying bases. Conversely, the ground commanders dispositions were made far from headquarters, making it difficult for Sutherland to be so involved.

No doubt the decades-long fight for institutional independence by the U.S. Army airmen made them extremely sensitive to any interference by ground officers in air matters. The fight within the service had been raging since 1918, and much of the controversy between ground and air officers centered on the command and control of the aircraft. Airmen were convinced that only by putting air power under the command of an air officer could the potential impact inherent in air power be achieved. Their reasoning was based, in part, on the realization that combat aircraft would be limited resources and if dispensed in small numbers would be ineffective. To be sure, institutional concerns also played a role--an independent mission, such as strategic bombardment, would vindicate the importance of air power and support an air force independent of the army, while an air force that only performed missions in support of ground units would remain tied to the army as just another combat arm. Ground officers believed with equal certainty that air power should be used primarily to help support the ground forces in battle. This struggle produced friction throughout the war

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Forces Guide, p. 49. Sutherland was awarded his official rating as a pilot under Philippine Army regulations when American forces recaptured the Philippines in 1945. Office Chief of Air Corps, Army Headquarters, Commonwealth of the Philippines, Special Order Number 7, June 23, 1945, Sutherland Papers, NA.

in many commands over who "controlled" air power. Kenney's own belief in an independent air arm, coupled with his personality and long experience with ground officers, made a confrontation with Sutherland over command of the air force all but inevitable. Likewise, the airmen's vehement complaints about Sutherland's interference should be understood in the context of a long-standing feud over the institutional status of the air force.<sup>151</sup>

Kenney, forewarned about Sutherland's practices, took Brett's advice about an early confrontation to heart. On August 4, 1942, the day Kenney officially took command, he received orders from MacArthur's office regarding air support for an impending combat operation. Rather than a broad directive which Kenney felt appropriate for the situation, the orders gave detailed information on exactly how the Allied Air Force should provide support. Kenney immediately challenged Sutherland, arguing, in typical Kenney fashion, that as the "most competent airman in the Pacific,"

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<sup>151</sup> The struggle between ground and air officers over the control of air units occurred at the beginning of World War II in other theaters as well. The early experiences of the British in the Middle East affirmed the need for a separation of the responsibilities between air and ground commanders. See Shelford Bidwell and Graham Dominick, Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 260-275, and Vincent Orange, Cunningham: A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham (London: Methuen, 1990; reprinted, Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1992), pp. 77-126. The poor performance of the United States Army and Army Air Force units during the invasion of North Africa resulted in a significant reorganization of forces. These changes, which copied the earlier Royal Air Force lessons, consolidated the control of air units under airmen and, at least in theory, made air power equal with ground forces, were formalized in War Department Field Manual 100-20, Command and Employment of Air Power, July 21, 1943, described by some ground officers as the Army Air Force's "Declaration of Independence." Quoted in Futrell, Ideas, p. 138. On air doctrine and the struggle over the control of air units in North Africa see, Thomas H. Greer, The Development of Air Doctrine in the Army Air Arm, 1917-1941, USAF Historical Studies, no. 89 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1955); I. B. Holley, Jr., "RAF/USAAF Land/Air Operations: Mediterranean & Northwest Europe," Air Power History 38 (Winter 1991), 30-34; Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan, eds., Air Superiority in World War II and Korea (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983); Daniel R. Mortensen, Close Air Support Operations: North Africa (Washington, D.C.: Research and Analysis Division Special Studies Series, U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1987); Orange, pp. 127-156.



it was Kenney's responsibility to decide how the air force would support an operation under the general mission guidance of the headquarters. When Sutherland tried to argue the point, Kenney suggested that they "go in the next room, see General MacArthur, and get this thing straight. I want to find out who is supposed to run this Air Force."<sup>152</sup> According to Kenney, Sutherland "immediately calmed down and rescinded the orders that I had objected to," then apologized, saying that prior to Kenney's taking command he had been forced to write the orders.<sup>153</sup> While Kenney may have exaggerated the effect of this meeting (the two men would have other confrontations throughout the war), this was the last time that Sutherland directly interfered with Kenney's combat operations. Perhaps Kenney's confrontation vindicated Brett's analysis that Sutherland was a bully who backed down when someone stood up to him. More likely, Sutherland and Kenney both knew that, as the chief of staff, Sutherland should not have been issuing the detailed orders that Kenney had complained of and, more importantly, both men knew that MacArthur would side with Kenney--Sutherland "knew he was going to lose."<sup>154</sup>

No doubt Sutherland was also aware that Kenney had already assured direct access to MacArthur, bypassing Sutherland. MacArthur's and Kenney's headquarters were both located in the AMP insurance building on the corner of Queen and Edward Street in Brisbane, MacArthur's office was on the eight floor and Kenney's on the

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<sup>152</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 52-53.

<sup>153</sup> Kenney diary, August 4, 1942, KP.

<sup>154</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 62; Kenney, interview with James, pp. 5-6, 18.

fifth, making it easy for Kenney to go up to MacArthur's office at almost any time.<sup>155</sup> Kenney made it his practice to see MacArthur at least once a day and the two often ate lunch together.<sup>156</sup> When MacArthur went to New Guinea to supervise operations, Kenney followed and returned to Australia at the same time.<sup>157</sup> Since both men lived in Lennon's Hotel, Kenney also visited MacArthur "quite often" in the evenings to talk about the air force and the war and cultivated a personal relationship with his chief.<sup>158</sup> Whether the two men talked of personal or professional matters or both during these conversations is unclear. It is clear that, at least in the first few months, Kenney focused on educating MacArthur about air power. According to Kenney, MacArthur did not know what his own air units could do and on his first official day as air commander Kenney spent two hours talking about air plans with MacArthur.<sup>159</sup> In addition to "selling" MacArthur on air power, Kenney's efforts also allowed him to break into MacArthur's circle of advisors that heretofore had primarily contained the staff that had accompanied him from the Philippines.<sup>160</sup> Kenney's personal dealings with MacArthur, according to one biographer, "introduced into the life of [MacArthur] an informal camaraderie which he had lacked."<sup>161</sup> In retrospect, Kenney felt that this

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<sup>155</sup> Wilson, pp. 254-260; Clare Stevenson and Honor Darling, eds., The WAAAF Book (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984), pp. 135-136, 157-158.

<sup>156</sup> Kenney, interview with Green, p. 12.

<sup>157</sup> Horner, p. 58, in RAAF in the Southwest Pacific.

<sup>158</sup> Kenney, Know, p. 57; Kenney, Reports, p. 91.

<sup>159</sup> Kenney diary, July 28, 1942, August 3, 1943, KP.

<sup>160</sup> James, Giants, p. 199.

<sup>161</sup> James, Years, 2:246. See also, Rogers, Good, p. 329.

relationship allowed him to get "away with murder because MacArthur would back me up."<sup>162</sup> With this personal relationship and access came a high level of trust between MacArthur and Kenney which allowed Kenney to use air power in the manner he saw fit, ususally with little interference from above. Kenney also became a close advisor to MacArthur on many matters, but, outside air issues, this relationship was more uneven. MacArthur did not always follow Kenney's advice, often, in fact, choosing a course opposed to Kenney's thinking.

## **Conclusion**

The changes Kenney instituted during his first months in command established the tenor of his leadership. He immediately began working to establish both a sound professional and personal realtionship with the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur, something neither previous air commander had been able to accomplish. But equally important in this relationship were the changes Kenney made in the air forces. He established a separate American air command, which conformed to MacArthur's desires, yet Kenney retained control of the Australian air units. Kenney also eliminated officers that were unfit for combat, a ruthless and continual process never ended until the war was over. Kenney's access to MacArthur allowed him to educate MacArthur about the various capabilities of air power and the benefits of using

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<sup>162</sup> Kenney, interview with James, p. 17.

the power of aviation--a set of capabilities that MacArthur desperately needed during the last half of 1942.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Papuan Campaign, August 1942 to January 1943**

**"We learned a lot and the next one will be better"<sup>1</sup>**

In late July 1942, about the time Kenney arrived in Australia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the American services approved a plan aimed at seizing the Japanese base at Rabaul, located in the northeastern corner of the island of New Britain about 450 miles from Port Moresby. Rabaul was the key base in the Japanese defensive perimeter in the south Pacific and its five airfields and deep harbor made it an excellent strategic position from which to attack and cut off the sea lines between the United States and Australia. Capturing Rabaul would remove this threat to Australia, roll back the Japanese gains, and allow Allied forces to advance up the northern coast of New Guinea enroute to the Philippine Islands, and then on to Japan. The plan consisted of three phases or "tasks." Task One was for American forces to capture the Santa Cruz Islands and Tulagi in the Solomons Island chain. This mission would be under the overall command of Admiral Nimitz, the commander in the Central Pacific and based in Hawaii. The local commander entrusted with the operation was Rear Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, commander of the Southern Pacific command. Task

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, p. 3, KP.

Two called for securing the northeastern coast of New Guinea and Task Three was the capture of Rabaul. MacArthur would be in command of these two, but was ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide air and naval assistance to Ghormley during his campaign in the Solomons.<sup>2</sup>

MacArthur's plan for securing New Guinea (code-named TULSA) depended on seizing airfields at Dobodura on the northern coast and building up the facilities at Milne Bay on the eastern end of the island. Then he would begin ground operations and eliminate Japanese forces on the rest of the island. The Japanese upset MacArthur's plans by striking first, staging a two-pronged attack on Port Moresby. The first group of Japanese troops landed on the north coast of New Guinea on July 21, near a native village called Buna, planning to march overland and capture Port Moresby. A second invasion force landed about a month later on the eastern coast of the island at Milne Bay.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 2)

The Japanese attack committed American and Australian ground forces to fighting in an area that one historian describes as "a military nightmare."<sup>4</sup> New Guinea, the second-largest island in the world, lies just north of Australia and is best described as some mythological creature that has a bird's head on the western end

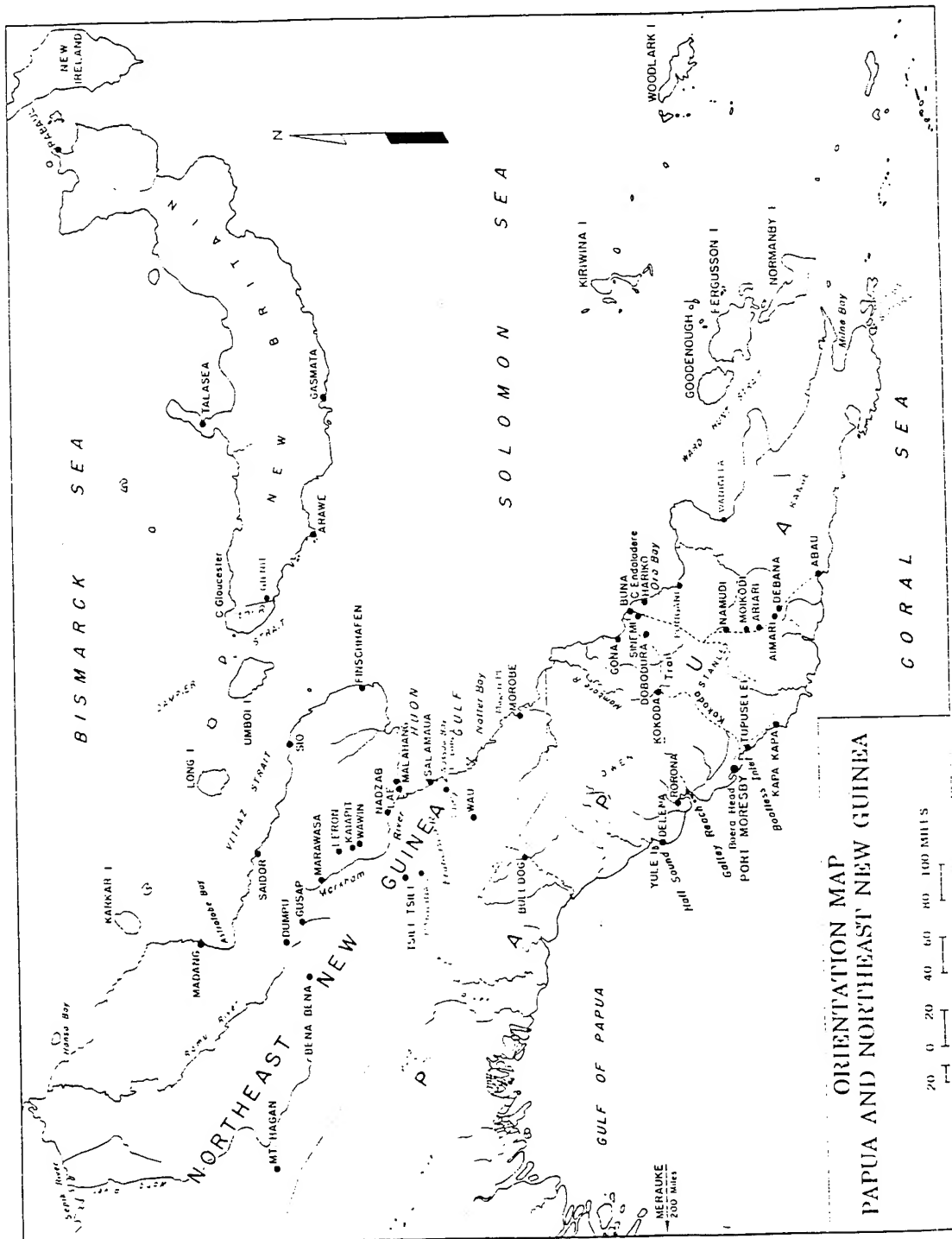
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<sup>2</sup> Message, MacArthur and Ghormley to COS and COMINCH, July 8, 1942, RG 4, MMMA; Matloff and Snell, 1941-1942, p. 262; Spector, Eagle, pp. 185-187; .

<sup>3</sup> "Joint Basic Plan for the Occupation and Defense of the Area New Britain, New Ireland, Admiralty Islands," Stephen J. Chamberlin Papers, MHI; Samuel Milner, Victory in Papua (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1957), pp. 50, 78-88; Craven and Cate, 4:22-24; James, Years, 2: 191-192.

<sup>4</sup> Milner, p. 56.

Figure 2--Papua and Northeast New Guinea<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Engineers, 6:77.

attached to a lizard's tail pointing east. Before World War II the western area, near the "head" of the bird, was controlled by the Dutch, while the eastern end was administered by the Australians. The terrain in Papua, the name given to the eastern most territory in New Guinea, was swampy, the heat oppressive, and the rainfall unrelenting. The Owen Stanley mountain range, which divides the eastern half of New Guinea, has peaks rising up to 13,000 feet. With 150 to 200 inches of rain a year, Papua, New Guinea was a land of jungles, rain forests, and swamps, with few towns and even fewer roads.<sup>6</sup>

While the mountains and weather created horrible conditions for the infantry soldiers on the ground, they also affected air operations. Because the only allied-controlled airfields were at Port Moresby, planes had to fly over the Owen Stanley mountains to attack Japanese airfields, shipping, or other targets. Typically, the weather in the morning would be clear, but heating during the day would cause large thunderstorms to build up over the mountains. The thunderstorms topped out above the altitudes that the aircraft could fly over, but if a pilot tried to duck under the clouds he risked running into a mountain peak. Penetrating the storms was also out of the questions as the wicked updrafts and downdrafts could literally break airplanes apart.<sup>7</sup> The clouds and storms, coupled with a lack of navigation aids, made it difficult for pilots and crews to find their way back to the bases. Fighter pilots, in particular, navigated by using ground references and went on missions hoping the

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<sup>6</sup> Milner, pp. 56-58.

<sup>7</sup> Air Evaluation Board, Southwest Pacific Area, "The Battle of the Bismarck Sea and Development of Masthead Attacks," July 1, 1945, p. 23, file 168.7103-37 HRA.



"weather did not close in as you returned."<sup>8</sup> The flight instruments in the aircraft made flying in clouds hazardous; one pilot recalled having compasses being "30 or more degrees in error," and not having a reliable artificial horizon.<sup>9</sup> These problems posed by the weather in the Southwest Pacific influenced Kenney's efforts throughout the war.

The Japanese attack on New Guinea, and the American offensive at Guadalcanal slated to begin on August 7, 1942, meant that Kenney's meager air units would be supporting major combat operations in both New Guinea and in the Solomons, some 500 miles distant to the east.<sup>10</sup> Although there was no written air campaign plan prior to the operation, as Kenney's operation evolved it became clear that his forces would be involved in four separate tasks: removing the Japanese air threat, attacking Japanese shipping, supporting the ground advance by attacking Japanese forces, and air lifting troops and supplies to the battlefield. Called on to perform all of this missions simultaneously, Kenney's constant challenge was to chose which missions took priority and to balance conflicting requirements.

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<sup>8</sup> John Stanifer, quoted in Lex McAulay, Into the Dragon's Jaws: The Fifth Air Force Over Rabaul (Mesa, Arizona: Champlin Fighter Museum Press, 1986), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Charles King, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:113.

## Attacking Rabaul

According to Kenney, his "one primary mission" was to reduce the Japanese air strength and gain control of the air.<sup>11</sup> Since the source of Japanese air strength in the region was at Rabaul, he reasoned that attacks directed at Japanese air units there would also support Admiral Ghormley's offensive in the Solomons.<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, who had previously urged Brett to hit airfields, enthusiastically approved Kenney's ideas "and said to go ahead, that I had carte blanche to do anything that I wanted to."<sup>13</sup>

In proposing his plan for the use of air power, Kenney drew on his own knowledge of air warfare and established doctrine in the Army Air Corps. The elimination of the opposing air force, especially in support of surface operations, was well known to airmen.<sup>14</sup> Kenney long believed that "freedom of action in the air and denial of the same to hostile air forces"<sup>15</sup> was the first objective of an air force and he had written in 1938 that "the denial to the enemy of freedom of air action is an essential preliminary to large-scale ground operations."<sup>16</sup> "The best way to combat hostile aviation," he believed, was, "to fight with the enemy in the air and to bomb his

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<sup>11</sup> Kenney diary, August 3, 1942, KP.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; Kenney, Reports, pp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Training Regulation 440-15, "Employment of the Air Forces of the Army," October 15, 1935; Frank M. Andrews, "Our Use of Air Power: The GHQ AF as an Instrument of Defense," Army Ordnance 18 (November-December 1937):138-140, both in Andrews Papers, LOC; Futrell, Ideas, pp. 33, 54-55, 65, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Kenney, "Composition of the Air Force," p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," p. 22.

airdromes, air depots, and aircraft factories."<sup>17</sup> The distance from the Japanese home islands, and the range of the aircraft at his disposal, made it impossible for Kenney to attack aircraft factories, or other strategic targets on the Japanese homeland, thus he concentrated on hitting the enemy airfields and destroying "enemy aircraft on the ground and in the air."<sup>18</sup>

Kenney did not envision one giant air battle that would determine control of the skies. On the contrary, he realized that, "The effort against the New Guinea airdromes should be continuous."<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Kenney's view of the war was encouraged, at least initially, by the fact that the Allies were outnumbered by the Japanese. In August 1942, the Japanese had 372 aircraft in the region. Although American air strength was formidable on paper, totaling 517 combat aircraft, only 150 were combat ready and most of the Australian aircraft were obsolete.<sup>20</sup> Kenney promised MacArthur that his first step towards air superiority would be a concentrated strike on an airfield near Rabaul on August 7, to correspond with the start of Ghormley's landing on Guadalcanal. In preparation, Kenney stopped operations in order to get 20 B-17s ready for a concentrated attack. Although small by later

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<sup>17</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Kenney, MacArthur I Know, p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Kenney diary, August 1, 1942, KP. Kenney exaggerated the number of enemy aircraft in his book and stated that the Japanese "had at least five times" the number of aircraft he had. Kenney, Reports, p. 62. The figures used in the official history vary, citing 450 American and 401 Japanese aircraft, Craven and Cate, 4:101-102, while another report uses a figure of 575 American aircraft, United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), Fifth Air Force in the War Against Japan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 14.

standards, this force represented the largest Allied air strike in the theater to date.<sup>21</sup>

While he sent B-17s to attack the airfields around Rabaul, shorter range A-20s, B-25s, and B-26s struck the New Guinea airfields using the parafrag bombs he had developed at the Tactical School and obtained from storage in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Kenney recorded the bombing of Rabaul on August 7 as a huge success. Eighteen B-17s took off from Port Moresby for the target and, although they were attacked by Japanese fighters, the crews claimed the destruction of 75 of the 150 Japanese aircraft "lined up wing tip to wingtip on both sides of the runway."<sup>23</sup> The attack greatly pleased MacArthur who accepted Kenney's recommendation that a pilot who died in the raid be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the heroic actions of the B-17 crews, the raid was probably not as successful as Kenney believed. Only sixteen B-17s actually took off on the mission, and thirteen actually made it to the target. Postwar reports from the Japanese indicated that the bombing inflicted only minor damage--far less than the results Kenney claimed.<sup>25</sup> Some of the errors were undoubtedly caused by the confusion in the battle area and the resulting reports of the crews in the attack, but another factor

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<sup>21</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 51-52.

<sup>22</sup> Kenney diary, July 13, 1942; September 2, 7, 1942, KP.

<sup>23</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 59-61.

<sup>25</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), Japanese Air Power Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 11; Craven and Cate, 4: 35.

was Kenney's misinterpreting an intercepted Japanese radio message.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Kenney was eager to grasp at any success, no matter how small, to boost the morale of his flying units. They, and General MacArthur, probably needed some proof of Kenney's ability as an air commander.

Large-sized raids, such as the one on August 7, were few and far between during Kenney's first months in command. When Kenney arrived the Japanese had control of the air in New Guinea, making it dangerous for bombers to be based at Port Moresby permanently. Instead, they flew from bases in Australia to Port Moresby for refueling, then continued on to Rabaul; a single mission required 36 to 48 hours from beginning to end.<sup>27</sup> As a result, even with very intensive support there were few concentrated attacks on the Rabaul during Kenney's first months in command. From the middle of September until the end of November, Kenney's support for Admiral Ghormley's efforts at Guadalcanal amounted to 180 B-17 flights and a handful of RAAF Catalinas on night bombing missions to Rabaul, and a smattering of attacks on other targets in the Solomon Islands.<sup>28</sup>

Kenney's plan to concentrate on Japanese air power was not without its critics. Throughout the fighting Admiral Ghormley asked that enemy shipping be given a

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<sup>26</sup> John B. Lundstrom, The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1994), p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Richard L. Watson, "Air Action in the Papuan Campaign July 21, 1942 to January 23, 1943," Army Air Forces Historical Study, Number 17, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Historical Division, August, 1944, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:111.

higher priority as a target than enemy air strength.<sup>29</sup> The number of aircraft made it impossible for Kenney to support every request and he was convinced that hostile aircraft represented the greatest potential danger to both Ghormley's operations and to MacArthur's and, therefore, should be attacked first. In September MacArthur's headquarters claimed that attacks on Rabaul had destroyed 93 planes and damaged 60 others resulting in "a marked influence on operations in the south Pacific area."<sup>30</sup> Despite the concern from other quarters over the lack of attacks on Japanese ships, Kenney stuck to his plan of destroying the Japanese air. Perhaps more importantly, he had convinced MacArthur of the virtue in his methods.<sup>31</sup>

### **Air Defense**

While the flights against Rabaul were aimed at reducing the Japanese air strength in the entire area, Kenney also focused on defending the skies over New Guinea. While he sent his shorter range bombers to hit enemy airfields in New Guinea, concentrating on their construction efforts at Buna, the most important factor in Kenney's efforts to gain control of the air, however, was an improvement in the air warning network in New Guinea.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Message, Marshall to MacArthur, September 15, 1942, RG, MMMA.

<sup>30</sup> Message MacArthur to Marshall, September 16, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid; Kenney, Reports, p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 63, 89

To defend against an enemy air attack, Allied fighters needed advanced warning of a raid. Early warning gave the air defenders two advantages. The earlier the aircraft were launched, the further away from the target they could intercept the incoming attackers. Meeting an enemy formation forty miles from the target, for example, was better than ten miles, because it gave the defenders more opportunities to disrupt the enemy formation and inflict losses. Early warning was also important because of the flying characteristics of the American P-39s and P-40s, the only fighter aircraft Kenney had available. Both aircraft climbed slowly, making it impossible for them to get to the altitude of the incoming attackers on short notice, and their engines rapidly lost power above 12,000 feet. In addition, the aircraft were not as maneuverable as the Japanese Zeroes which escorted the attacking bombers.<sup>33</sup> In short, the P-39s and P-40s went into air combat with some significant disadvantages that could only be overcome through good tactics. Rather than engaging the Japanese fighters in a turning engagement, American pilots found that by using hit and run tactics they could successfully attack the enemy formations. These tactics capitalized on the advantages of the American aircraft--heavier firepower and the ability to dive faster than the Zero-- while minimizing their lack of power and maneuverability. Using these methods demanded prior warning which would allow the American fighters to climb to high altitude before attacking the Japanese bombers. With no

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<sup>33</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:212-214.

warning of the inbound attacks, Allied aircraft simply could not stop the Japanese bombing raids.<sup>34</sup>

On Kenney's first visit to Port Moresby he was able to witness an enemy air raid and estimated that the warning time had been "less than five minutes."<sup>35</sup> The first, and perhaps most obvious, solution to the warning problem was the installation of additional radar sets in New Guinea. Although two radar stations were up and running near Port Moresby at the beginning of September (although one had to be relocated two weeks later), the radar sets provided limited warning time.<sup>36</sup> The radars operated by the RAAF could see targets out to 75 miles, while the maximum detection range of the mobile American radar systems, the SCR-270, was 150 miles, although in practice the maximum detection range was 110 miles.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the SCR-270 could only detect the incoming aircraft's range and direction, not their altitude, and the equipment had numerous blind spots, such as detecting aircraft at low altitude. To compensate for the inability of the SCR-270 to detect the target's height, a critical factor in intercepting enemy aircraft, it was sometimes paired with the SCR-268, a radar used to cue searchlights and anti-aircraft guns, which could compute the altitude of the aircraft, but only had a maximum range of twenty-five miles.<sup>38</sup> There were no

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Caidin, The Ragged, Rugged, Warriors (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), pp. 227, 286-288; Kenney, Reports, pp. 38, 69; Craven and Cate, I:476-477; IV:24.

<sup>35</sup> Kenney diary, July 30, 1942, KP.

<sup>36</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 89, 98.

<sup>37</sup> George Raynor Thompson, Dixie R. Harris, Pauline M. Oakes, and Dulany Terrett, The Signal Corps: The Test (Washington, D.C.: Officer of the Chief of Military History, 1957), pp. 94, 98; Craven and Cate, 4:83.

<sup>38</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:96



American radars in Australia or New Guinea until April 1942 and by June four SCR-270s had been installed in Australia, but only the short-range SCR-268s were in Port Moresby.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the technical limitations of the radar sets, there was a lack of spare parts and few operators or repairmen in the theater who had much experience in using the equipment. By the end of July 1942, less than 300 officers and men had graduated from radar training, and much of that experience was rudimentary at best.<sup>40</sup> Even the geography of the region posed problems. Since the radars could not see through the ground, the Owen Stanley mountains effectively hid the attacking aircraft until they were very close to Port Moresby.<sup>41</sup> Given all of these limitations in the radar system, it was clear that Kenney needed some other means of early warning.

Using ground spotters to report on incoming air raids was one method for providing longer warning times. To help defend their vast, lightly-inhabited tracts of territory in the south Pacific, the Royal Australian Navy instituted a system of spotters, called coastwatchers, as early as 1919. These coastwatchers, usually government administrators or plantation managers living in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, were volunteers who were provided with radios and instructed to provide information on enemy ship or air movements. The coastwatchers, supervised by Australian Navy Lieutenant Eric Feldt, were absorbed by MacArthur's

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<sup>39</sup> Thompson, pp. 111-112. The SCR-268s were augmented by SCR-516s, an update version of the SCR-268 with better low altitude coverage, but having about the same range. Thompson, p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 24, 1942, KP; Thompson, pp. 211-217, 326-327.

<sup>41</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 87.

headquarters into the newly formed Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), an organization that managed the espionage, sabotage, and guerrilla activities in the Southwest Pacific.<sup>42</sup> If enemy aircraft flew over a location which contained a coastwatcher they would radio the time they made the observation along with the size of the raid and its approximate direction. This information was sent simultaneously to the Combined Operations Intelligence Center at MacArthur's headquarters and to the fighter control headquarters.<sup>43</sup>

The original coastwatcher network established by the Australians had been concentrated in the Solomon Islands. After the Japanese invasion many of the coastwatchers disappeared into the jungles and became a valuable part of the network in warning of Japanese air raids on Guadalcanal. In New Guinea and New Britain, on the other hand, the organization had to be started almost "from scratch."<sup>44</sup>

Government officials and settlers on the islands who had been displaced by the Japanese invasion were recruited as coastwatcher, but it was not until July 1942 that the first coastwatcher was put ashore in New Britain, and his task was to obtain intelligence on Rabaul, not set up an air raid warning system. Near the end of 1942 the AIB attempted to land several teams of coastwatchers in New Britain but their

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<sup>42</sup> Eric A. Feldt, The Coastwatchers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 4-7; Allison Ind, Allied Intelligence Bureau (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1958), pp. 17-20; Charles A. Willoughby and John Chamberlain, MacArthur, 1941-1951 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), pp. 145-150.

<sup>43</sup> Feldt, p. 12; Willoughby, pp. 145-150.

<sup>44</sup> Feldt, p. 168.

efforts were hampered by the large Japanese presence.<sup>45</sup> Newly trained coastwatchers were also sent to areas in New Guinea to provide intelligence about the Japanese movements. Their efforts were also disrupted by the large numbers of Japanese forces and from most accounts these coastwatchers were useful in locating Japanese supply points, but actually provided little in the way of early warning about Japanese air raids.<sup>46</sup>

An indication of an impending Japanese air attack could also be gleaned from what is broadly called signals intelligence. Signals intelligence was nothing more than information about an enemy derived from their use of electronic equipment. While this intelligence was obtained from many different sources, such as radar signals and telephone transmissions, in World War II signals intelligence, commonly known today by the code word "ULTRA," focused on intercepting and decoding enemy radio messages.<sup>47</sup> Intercepting the Japanese communications and extracting useable information required many steps and organizations. The actual collection of the data was accomplished by intercept sites that were located as far forward as possible in friendly territory. At these isolated locations teams of highly trained operators would scan known and suspected enemy radio frequencies in an effort to find Japanese radio messages. The material they gathered was then sent to Central Bureau, an Allied organization formed in April 1942 shortly after MacArthur's arrival in Australia and

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<sup>45</sup> Feldt, pp. 168-171, 176-177, 186; Ind, pp. 67-78.

<sup>46</sup> Feldt, pp. 17, 178-179, 186; Ind, p. 80-83.

<sup>47</sup> Edward J. Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War Against Japan, 1942-1945 (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), p. xi.

based in Brisbane. After transcribing the Japanese messages into clear text and translating them into English, Central Bureau delivered the information to MacArthur's intelligence division where it was integrated with other intelligence sources for analysis and ultimately used to plan future operations.<sup>48</sup>

Like the American military, the Australian armed services had been working on intercepting and decoding Japanese radio messages even before World War II and many of the field sites which intercepted the Japanese radio messages were manned by the Australians. In addition to breaking the encryption codes used by the Japanese military, the Australians were also familiar with radio codes used for routine air-to-ground transmissions. The Japanese used a special Morse code, called "kana" code, that had 71 symbols instead of the international code of 26 symbols, making it difficult to intercept and transcribe even if a message was sent in the clear.<sup>49</sup> Through intensive training operators were able to become as proficient as the Japanese in receiving the "kana" code messages and by October 1942 were able to keep a 24 hour watch on any Japanese frequency.<sup>50</sup>

Intercepting radio messages provided the Allies with a wealth of intelligence information on a large number of topics. Most of the messages between various headquarters were coded and revealed the long-range plans of the Japanese and the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-22.

<sup>49</sup> Jack Bleakley, *The Eavesdroppers* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991), pp. 6-10. For American efforts Drea, *MacArthur's ULTRA*, pp. 8-12; Spector, *Eagle*, p. 447-448.

<sup>50</sup> Bleakley, pp. 51, 70.

dispositions of large forces. This type of information was very valuable and used to make plans and decisions at a variety of levels. Because aircraft relied heavily on using radio messages these intercepted radio signals, either in code or in plain language, between aircraft and the ground stations also allowed early warning of enemy air attacks.<sup>51</sup> A typical scenario went something like this. Shortly after takeoff from its a base a Japanese bomber would send a message, typically "KA N" (roughly translated as "How do you read this transmission?") along with the call sign of the base and the aircraft. The base would then reply back. These transmissions provided the initial indication of an impending attack. This radio communication, usually from an aircraft taking off from Rabaul, provided little information on the size of the raid or its destination. Determining the intended target of the attack was the responsibility of the Direction Finding (D/F) radio intercept units. These units were alerted soon after the first message and tracked the subsequent radio transmissions of the aircraft to determine the bearing from the site. This information was then transmitted to a command center for plotting and, if possible, correlated with other data, such as sightings from coastwatchers. The end product was an approximate track of the inbound bombers and their intended targets.<sup>52</sup> The initial message that signaled an impending air raid was also sent to the appropriate air defense

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<sup>51</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records, Part J-Field Sections," CRS B5436/1, Australian Archives. My thanks to Edward Drea for a copy of this report.

<sup>52</sup> Bleakley sketches out this mission, pp. 52-53. For other examples see "Operational History of the 126th Radio Intelligence Company" February 1944, SRH-227, reprinted in James L. Gilbert and John P. Finnegan eds., U. S. Army Signals Intelligence in World War II: A Documentary History (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1993), p. 209. SRH refers to Special Reference Histories, declassified documents about signals intelligence released to the National Archives by the National Security Agency.

headquarters and the subsequent information was used to formulate a plan for launching aircraft and positioning them to attack the incoming force.<sup>53</sup>

By the middle of 1942 the Allies had broken the codes used by the Japanese Navy for air-to-ground transmissions and were able to read the messages almost as soon as they were sent.<sup>54</sup> Even if unable to read the messages, for example, when the Japanese changed their codes, the intercept units could infer a great deal of meaning from the standard pattern of Japanese radio messages. Weather reports, even if encoded, were easy to decipher because they followed a standard format. These weather reports were, especially in 1942, "a sure indication of a raid to follow."<sup>55</sup> Many of the messages that provided the alert about an air raid, however, were sent in the unencoded "kana" code allowing the members of the intercept unit to quickly analyze the Japanese intentions. Even if the aircraft did not transmit in the air, warnings could still be issued based on the radio activities heard on the ground.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the early warning indications of air raids, these routine radio transmissions were also useful in other ways. The weather reports from the Japanese bases helped Allied commanders in planning air missions. If the Japanese weatherman said the cloud cover over the base was heavy, there was no need to send a mission to

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<sup>53</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records;" Bleakley, pp. 72, 75; Geoffrey Ballard, On ULTRA Active Service (Richmond, Australia: Spectrum Publications, 1991), p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> Ballard, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records."

<sup>56</sup> Bleakley, p. 48; "Central Bureau Technical Records."

that target.<sup>57</sup> Japanese aircraft escorting ship movements reported the position, course, and speed of the convoys, giving Allied commanders a clear picture of where the ships were going and when they could be intercepted.<sup>58</sup> Finally, when the Japanese sent additional aircraft into the area, ULTRA intercepts tracked their moves, giving Kenney a very accurate assessment of the enemy's air strength.<sup>59</sup>

The units that did the actual work of intercepting the radio messages were called Wireless Sections in the Australian Army and Wireless Units in the Royal Australian Air Force.<sup>60</sup> In September 1942, 55 Wireless Section of the Australian Army was sent to Port Moresby to provide early warning about enemy air raids. This section, along with a D/F unit, provided early warning in New Guinea until December 1942 when they were replaced by a detachment from the RAAF's 1 Wireless Unit.<sup>61</sup> As early as July 1942, these field units were able to provide seven hours of warning of a raid from Rabaul, versus the thirty minutes available from radar.<sup>62</sup>

Even if early warning information was available, the value and importance of signals intelligence was not immediately clear to all participants in the war. Although

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<sup>57</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records;" Bleakley, p. 75.

<sup>58</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records;" "Achievements of the Signal Security Agency in World War II," 1945, SRH-349, reprinted in Gilbert, pp. 96-97; Ballard, p. 203.

<sup>59</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records."

<sup>60</sup> Ballard, p. 197. In the United States Army, the Signal Radio Intelligence Company was the name given to units intercepting enemy radio messages and the Army Air Forces units were called Radio Squadron Mobile. Gilbert, pp. 1-4.

<sup>61</sup> Ballard, p. 182; Bleakley, pp. 75-76.

<sup>62</sup> Bleakley, p. 55.

in retrospect it is easy to see the value of this kind of intelligence of air operations, Allied commanders in World War II were sometimes hesitant to make decisions based on the information. This was, after all, a very new capability and few officers had received any exposure to signals intelligence prior to the war. One officer who was based in the Philippines at the outbreak of the war, maintained that air officers ignored his warnings of impending air raids and a high ranking air commander told him "to go somewhere else and peddle [his] dots and dashes."<sup>63</sup> In addition, the intelligence was not unambiguous; there was always the danger of a false alarm which could lower the value commanders placed on this information.<sup>64</sup> Kenney seems to have eagerly accepted the value of this intelligence and did not hesitate in using it from the beginning. Perhaps his willingness to use the intelligence was a result of his technical background. He certainly would have understood the technical premise of radio waves and the possibility of intercepting the transmissions. According to his intelligence officer, Kenney also enjoyed new ideas and was always eager to learn more about the capabilities and intentions of the Japanese.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Kenney's belief in the reliability of the intelligence was also affected by his situation. He needed some early warning system and signals intelligence provided an excellent means for filling this gap. Whatever his motivation, Kenney was eager to make use of the Australian wireless units. In the fall of 1942, after several months of experience, Kenney

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<sup>63</sup> Howard W. Brown, "Reminiscences of Lieutenant Colonel Howard W. Brown," SRH-045, reprinted in Listening to the Enemy, ed. Ronald H. Spector (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), pp. 55-57, quote on p. 69; Spector, Eagle, p. 447.

<sup>64</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records."

<sup>65</sup> Hewitt, pp. 83, 174, 202, 224.



requested five more RAAF wireless units. The request was forwarded to the Australian Prime Minister who approved the formation of two new units.<sup>66</sup> In the future, Kenney would rely on wireless unit to provide early warning of enemy air raids and based many of his moves on the rich intelligence they gleaned from the Japanese radio messages.

### **Stopping the Advance**

While Kenney's forces were engaged in the frustrating and drawn-out process of gaining and maintaining some level of control in the air, the Japanese forces that landed in New Guinea in late July 1942 continued their advance over the Owen Stanley mountains towards Port Moresby. Kenney focused his efforts on striking the ships bringing supplies to the north coast of Papua.<sup>67</sup>

The established doctrine of Army Air Corps called for medium altitude attacks on shipping, but airmen had achieved few successes using these tactics in the Southwest Pacific. During the battle of the Coral Sea Allied aircraft had done little damage. Although unable to stop the initial Japanese landings in New Guinea, aircraft were able to destroy supplies that were landed near Buna and, at least on one occasion,

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<sup>66</sup> Bleakley, pp. 75-76.

<sup>67</sup> Milner, pp. 61-71.

turned back a ship bringing supplies.<sup>68</sup> Even with these limited successes it was clear to Kenney that, "We need something soon to stop Jap shipping."<sup>69</sup>

One deficiency in the prewar thinking was that it anticipated using formations of at least nine bombers to release enough bombs to hit a maneuvering target.<sup>70</sup> Kenney seldom had nine bombers to fly in one mission and, in any event, weather conditions often made it impossible for nine aircraft to fly together to locate and hit a moving target.<sup>71</sup> The realities of war, in the form of Japanese aircraft, also highlighted shortcomings in the doctrine. As one bombardier told Kenney, "When I'm bending over that bombsight trying to get lined up on one of those Jap ships and the bullets start coming through the windows in front of me, they take my mind off my work."<sup>72</sup> Eliminating Japanese air power would eventually solve this problem, but until that happened Kenney was not hesitant to junk the prevailing doctrine. Local conditions, he told Arnold, "have made it necessary to improvise and adapt our procedure to meet existing conditions."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:22-24, 96; Milner, pp. 50, 78; Reports of MacArthur, 2:143.

<sup>69</sup> Kenney diary, August 13, 1942, KP; Message, MacArthur to Marshall, September 16, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>70</sup> Message, Arnold to Kenney, November 18, 1942, KP; Memorandum to Chief of the Air Corps, From Commanding General GHQ Air Force, Reference: Methods and results to be expected from an attack of naval targets at sea by army aircraft, April 18, 1936, Andrews Papers, LOC. At one time instructors at the Air Corps Tactical School recommended at least 12 bombers to hit a battleship. John G. Williams, "A Bomb Sight View of the Red Navy," Air Corps Tactical School, Maxwell Field, Alabama, 1937-1938, file 248.222-86 HRA.

<sup>71</sup> Message Kenney to Arnold, November 27, 1942, KP.

<sup>72</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 66.

<sup>73</sup> Message Kenney to Arnold, November 27, 1942, KP.

The first change Kenney made was to move to night bombing, which he believed would be more effective than daylight bombing. While he acknowledged the difficulty of finding the targets at night, he felt this drawback was balanced by other factors. "At night," he argued, "you don't have Zeros shooting through the bombardier's window and taking his mind off his work; a moving vessel does not see the bombs leave the plane...nor have time to dodge."<sup>74</sup>

Kenney's earlier work on attack aviation also led him to believe that low altitude attacks should be tried. "Low altitude will give more surprise, less trouble from fighters, and more bomb hits,"<sup>75</sup> he argued. Kenney championed a low altitude technique for sinking ships termed "skip bombing," so named because pilots would fly at low altitudes and release their bombs between 350 and 200 feet from the target. Ideally, the bombs would skip along the water like a rock until they hit the side of the vessel. The bombs would either explode on impact or sink and explode just under the bottom of the ship.<sup>76</sup> Although Kenney claimed credit for instituting this tactic, in fact, low altitude bombing against ships had been done by the British and the Germans in Europe and the Australian Air Force in the Pacific had already experimented with the technique in February 1942, months before Kenney's arrival. General Arnold initiated testing in the United States of low altitude bombing against ships in early

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<sup>74</sup> Letter, Kenney to Major General Muir S. Fairchild, Director of Military Requirements, December 8, 1942, KP.

<sup>75</sup> August 13, 1942, KP.

<sup>76</sup> Major Frank O. Brown, "Report on Skip Bombing," 14 March 1943, Appendix 9 in Watson, pp. 170- 173.

1942 and published procedures for using this tactic in late July 1942.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the precise origins of the tactic, Kenney became an enthusiastic supporter of low altitude attacks and they became a mainstay for attacks on shipping in the Southwest Pacific. While the method was first tested by A-20 aircraft, it was the B-17 units that perfected the skip bombing technique. The big B-17s, however, were too vulnerable and unmaneuverable to risk on skip bombing missions unless they were done under the protective cover of darkness or under "circumstances that warrant a high casualty rate."<sup>78</sup> The mainstay for skip bombing in the Southwest Pacific became the Mitchell B-25s medium bombers. They later modified their attacks to hit the ships directly, rather than skipping the bombs from a short distance in front of the target. To distinguish these alternative low altitude attacks from skip bombing, units termed the new tactic "masthead-height" bombing.<sup>79</sup>

Kenney's shift to low altitude attacks was not only a dramatic change from established methods, but also exhibited a flexibility that was missing in many other air commanders, who faced many of the same problems Kenney encountered. Insufficient

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<sup>77</sup> Kenney intimated that he and his aide thought up the idea by themselves. Kenney, Reports, pp. 21-22. This was not the case, as Kenney himself noted on several occasions. George C. Kenney, "Air Power in the Southwest Pacific," Air Force 27 (June 1944): 10; Kenney interview with Hasdorff, p. 77. For the British and German use see Timothy D. Gann, Fifth Air Force Light and Medium Bomber Operations during 1942 and 1943 (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 1993), pp. 8-10; H. H. Arnold Journal, "Trip to England," April 1941, Arnold Papers, LOC; Arnold, Global Mission, pp. 230-231. For Australian missions, see Lex MacAuly, Battle of the Bismarck Sea (New York: St. Martins Press, 1991), p. 21. For American testing, see Proof Department, Bombing Section, Army Air Forces Proving Ground, Eglin Field, Florida, "Final Report on Minimum Altitude Attack on Water-Borne Surface Vessels with Aircraft Bombs," December 7, 1942; War Department Training Circular Number 46, July 25, 1942, Box 12, Folder 3, Emmett O'Donnel Papers, Special Collections, United States Air Force Academy Library.

<sup>78</sup> Headquarters Advon 5AF Report, "Skip Bombing," Sutherland Papers.

<sup>79</sup> Gann, p. 10; Craven and Cate, 4:141.

numbers of aircraft available and poor weather conditions plagued the adjacent south Pacific theater as well, but Army air commanders in the south Pacific did not demonstrate the same ability to break with prewar thinking. The ranking Army air officer, Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon, blamed the problems on the lack of training for the aircrews, the extreme range at which he was forced to engage the naval forces, and problems with the bombs. Rather than change tactics, he felt that "Better results may be expected with more experience, operating in greater mass, and with [an] improved fuze [for the bombs]." He also urged that he be given greater control over employment decisions about the aircraft.<sup>80</sup> Several months later, air commanders in the south Pacific were still counting on using a minimum of nine aircraft to attack shipping.<sup>81</sup>

The fall of 1942 saw a serious reassessment among the leaders of the Army Air Forces about bombing accuracy.<sup>82</sup> Although General Arnold remained convinced of the value of high altitude bombing, he was concerned about the poor results and the inability of air commanders to adapt. He had received reports of aircraft bombing from high altitude "regardless of the target, opposition, weather, or other conditions."<sup>83</sup> In a letter to all air commanders in late October, Arnold begged them to

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<sup>80</sup> Letter, Harmon to Marshall, September 9, 1942, p. 3, Millard F. Harmon Papers, MHI.

<sup>81</sup> Letter, Nathan F. Twining, Commanding General 13th Air Force to Commander Aircraft, South Pacific Area, Subject: Tentative Tactical Doctrine, April 28, 1943, file 750.549-1 HRA.

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of the extent of the problem in both Europe and the Pacific see McFarland, pp. 168-193.

<sup>83</sup> Letter Arnold to Each Air Force Commander Throughout the World, Subject: Employment of Air Forces, October 30, 1942, Arnold Papers, LOC.

be more flexible, imploring them to "approach their problems with open minds and use methods which have the best chances of success."<sup>84</sup> He worried about a tendency to adopt a "certain rigidity of mind" that prevented them from employing their aircraft in the most effective manner.<sup>85</sup> Arnold also initiated measures to improve the methods for analyzing bombing errors, and attempted to correct the problems in bombing accuracy through better training.<sup>86</sup>

For his part, Kenney needed no urging to adapt to new circumstances. He had started efforts at skip bombing shortly soon after he took command and also tasked American fighters to escort bombers to their targets, offering protection for the bombers while they were in the heavily defended target areas. Given the long distances in the Southwest Pacific and the short range of the American fighter aircraft, however, this was not widely available in 1942. "Our...short-sightedness, mine included, didn't put the range in our fighters to do the job out here," Kenney wrote soon after taking command. "As soon as the P-38s get here with their extra range we'll add more [range] with droppable wing tanks."<sup>87</sup> Kenney's concern about escorting the bombers was driven partly out of concern for the men flying the mission, but also out of a hard-hearted assessment of the number of aircraft he had available.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Headquarters Army Air Forces. Routing and Record Sheet, Subject: Bombing Presentation data, November 19, 1942; Routing and Record Sheet, "Kenney's bombing methods," November 28, 1942; Letter, Arnold to Commanding General Second Air Force, December 12, 1942, Arnold Papers, LOC.

<sup>87</sup> Kenney diary, August 13, 1942. KP: Kenney, Reports, p. 66.

Based on the number of aircraft that were being delivered to the Southwest Pacific as replacements, Kenney figured that he could only afford to lose 2 percent of the aircraft sent out on a mission.<sup>88</sup> With this in mind the struggle to increase the range of his fighter aircraft became a constant in Kenney's efforts throughout the war.

In addition to knocking out the Japanese air forces and sinking the ships supplying the landing at Buna, Allied aircraft were also used to hit targets along the Kokoda Trail. From as far back as his days of teaching attack aviation Kenney had not been in favor of attacking the forward line of troops, but preferred to leave those to the ground forces, while air attacks concentrated on reinforcements and supplies. Not surprisingly, Kenney was not in favor of attacking the Japanese infantry troops directly, preferring to hit the overland supply lines, and after returning from a visit to Port Moresby during the Japanese advance he met with MacArthur and discussed the problems in finding and bombing the enemy. Kenney insisted that the best contribution his air forces could make was "to sink ships and shoot down planes. General MacArthur agreed," he remembers, "and said to keep right on doing what I was doing."<sup>89</sup> His forces continued to pound the Japanese construction efforts at an airfield near Buna and to stop the shipping coming into port. There were also many sorties flown against the overland supply route, but hitting those targets in the jungle was difficult. One lucrative target on the trail was a suspension bridge at a river crossing called Wairopi. This target was attacked daily during the Japanese advance,

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<sup>88</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, November 3, 1942, KP.

<sup>89</sup> Kenney diary, September 3, 1942, KP.

but not knocked down until the beginning of October.<sup>90</sup> Valuable assistance in finding and hitting supply targets came from Australian coastwatchers inserted into the Japanese territory in New Guinea to provide warnings of impending air attacks. The Allied Intelligence Bureau inserted four teams of coastwatchers, mainly Australian Army officers, who found hidden supply dumps and barges that the Japanese were using to move supplies and men. Their knowledge of the area allowed them to give very precise instructions as to the location of the targets and resulted in the destruction of many of the supplies the Japanese were able to get ashore.<sup>91</sup>

The loss of supplies, however, did little initially to slow the Japanese advance. The Japanese forces made rapid progress in their drive on Port Moresby and pushed the Australian forces back along the Kokoda Trail. By September 7, 1942, the Japanese were approaching Port Moresby.<sup>92</sup> As Australian troops rushed to Port Moresby to defend against this main assault, MacArthur and his staff tried to figure out how they might outflank and defeat the Japanese forces.<sup>93</sup>

As Allied commanders wrestled with the problems of defeating the advance over the Owen Stanley mountains they also confronted a Japanese landing on the southeastern tip of New Guinea at Milne Bay. This prong of the Japanese advance threatened to outflank the Allied base at Port Moresby and give the Japanese

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<sup>90</sup> Kenney diary, October 1, 1942, KP; Milner, p. 97.

<sup>91</sup> Feldt, pp. 178-179; Ind, pp. 80-83.

<sup>92</sup> Milner, pp. 81-89.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-95.



possession of a good airfield and harbor. Allied commanders had also realized the benefits of Milne Bay and positioned two Australian infantry brigades and two squadrons of RAAF P-40s to defend the engineers working on the airfields and dock.<sup>94</sup> Kenney had plenty of warning about the possibility of another Japanese move to New Guinea and increased reconnaissance of the shipping routes to Milne Bay.<sup>95</sup> One Japanese convoy left Rabaul for Milne Bay on August 24 and, despite what Kenney termed a "heavy use of air," the Japanese forces, aided by bad weather, were able to land on the north side of the bay on the night of August 25.<sup>96</sup> Their plan was to move along the northern shore and advance westward to the coastal plain where they would capture the airfield. The bad weather encountered during the attack on the convoy continued to plague air efforts, during much of the fighting it was very rainy, with cloud heights around 2000 feet and visibility about half a mile.<sup>97</sup> Kenney, alerted by the intelligence sources, realized the seriousness of the situation and on August 26 charged Whitehead with putting every effort into stopping the attack.<sup>98</sup> Fortunately for the Allies, the weather abated somewhat the next day, allowing every type of Allied aircraft to attack the supplies on shore, the unloading transports in the

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<sup>94</sup> Milner, pp. 76-78.

<sup>95</sup> Drea, pp. 44-46; Kenney, Reports, p. 76.

<sup>96</sup> Kenney diary, August 25, 1942, KP; Reports of MacArthur, 2:153-154; Watson, pp. 29-30; Milner, pp. 78-81. Most of Kenney's "hunches" he mentioned in his memoir about this operation were actually analysis based on good intelligence about the Japanese actions. Compare Kenney, Reports, pp. 82-83, and Drea, pp. 44-45.

<sup>97</sup> John Mordike, "Turning the Japanese Tide: Air Power at Milne Bay August-September 1942," in The RAAF in the Southwest Pacific Area 1942-1945, pp. 78-79.

<sup>98</sup> Kenney diary, August 26, 1942, KP.

bay, and the Japanese soldiers advancing to the airfield. These strikes were effective in destroying most of the food and forcing the Japanese to move only at night.<sup>99</sup> They advanced as far as the airfield, but were turned back by the heroic efforts of the Australian defenders. Without supplies or reinforcements the Japanese thrust ran out of momentum. The remaining troops were evacuated on September 4 and the threat to Port Moresby from the east ended.<sup>100</sup>

While airmen helped stop the immediate Japanese threat, they also played a role in ending the threat at Milne Bay far from the actual fighting. At the start of the Milne Bay attack, the Japanese dispatched seven barges carrying 350 troops to reinforce their landing. Coastwatchers tracked the barges on August 24 and the next day reported them stopped at Goodenough Island. Nine P-40s were dispatched and attacked the barges, sinking them all. Once again, timely intelligence had focused the use of air power at exactly the right spot at the right time. The landing force was not only kept from the battle at Milne Bay, they were stranded on the island for two months.<sup>101</sup>

There was little doubt of the impact of Kenney's airmen in this battle. Although they did not prevent the initial landing, they were able to effectively cut off the Japanese forces from any further reinforcements. Their efforts were aided by several factors. The location of Milne Bay in relation to Port Moresby allowed Allied

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<sup>99</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 84-88; Reports of MacArthur, 2:155-157; Milner, pp. 81-84; Craven and Cate, 4:96-97.

<sup>100</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:155-157; Milner, pp. 81-88.

<sup>101</sup> Mordike, p. 88; Reports of MacArthur, 2:153-157; Craven and Cate, 4:97.

aircraft to fly numerous missions without having to contend with the weather over the Owen Stanley mountains. They were also assisted by Australian army officers on the ground who directed the aircraft to the enemy supply points. In addition, the Japanese could offer little air support of their own. Their air bases in New Guinea were too far away, and most of the aircraft at Rabaul were supporting the attack on Guadalcanal.<sup>102</sup> An important factor in the Allied success was Kenney's ability to concentrate his forces there at the most critical moment. Despite the other demands for aircraft, during the end of August and the beginning of September the Japanese advance on Milne Bay represented their most threatening move on Port Moresby. Recognizing the importance of the battle, and having control of all air assets, Kenney was able to throw everything he had into the engagement.

With the Japanese advance at Milne Bay stymied, Kenney now turned his attention to defeating the Japanese advance on Port Moresby. MacArthur's options for fighting the Japanese were limited. The jungle terrain made an attempt to march overland almost impossible and this option was ruled out when engineers were sent out in early September to find alternate trails.<sup>103</sup> An attack from the sea against the Japanese positions near Buna was an attractive option, but there were several factors that mitigated against such an assault, including Japanese control of the air and the sea on the northern coast of New Guinea, a lack of suitable landing craft, and little

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<sup>102</sup> Milner, pp. 81-88.

<sup>103</sup> Gregory M. Franzwa and William J. Ely, Lief Sverdrup (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1980), pp. 115-129. Sverdrup was one of the engineers who was sent to look for land routes.

information on the reefs in the area.<sup>104</sup> As a result, MacArthur, with a little prompting, turned to air power to move his forces.

The agency responsible for Kenney's airlift operations was Air Transport Command, headed by the Directorate of Air Transport (DAT). This organization, formed under General Brett, was headed by Group Captain Harold Gatty and was a true multi-national organization composed of men and equipment from the United States, Australia, and the Netherlands. Air transports had already been used in a number of operations. In March they airlifted a United States Coast Artillery battalion from Brisbane to Darwin, a distance of 1800 miles.<sup>105</sup> In late May they had flown a detachment of 300 Australian soldiers known as the Kanga force into the Buolo valley near the town of Wau in New Guinea to stem a Japanese advance into the interior. This force remained at Wau and was dependent on aircraft for most of their supplies.<sup>106</sup> During a visit to Port Moresby during the Japanese advance, Kenney conferred with Whitehead about the possibility of flying troops into Port Moresby. Kenney was worried that the Japanese would soon be threatening his airfields and he wanted to reinforce the Australian forces fighting on the Kokoda Trail. Although MacArthur approved the plan, there were serious misgivings among members of

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<sup>104</sup> James, *Years*, 2:239, 241-242; Milner, pp. 105, 168; Samuel Eliot Morison, History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. 6, Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1950), p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> William H. Carleton, "History of the Directorate of Air Transport, Allied Air Forces-Southwest Pacific Area and the 322d Troop Carrier Wing," pp. 1-7, file 706.306 HRA; Erickson S. Nichols, "Historical Record of the Air Transport Command for the six months ending June 30th, 1942," file 733.01 HRA.

<sup>106</sup> Kenney diary, May 22, 1942, KP; Milner, pp. 42-43, 64-65, 76.

MacArthur's staff. Nevertheless, on September 15 elements of the 126th Infantry were flown into Port Moresby.<sup>107</sup> Kenney's success in this first movement, and his continued worries about the airfields, prompted him to offer to fly in another regiment, an operation that forced him into something of a bind as he did not have enough aircraft available. He succeeded only by borrowing transports from the Australian airlines and using some of his precious bombers as transports.<sup>108</sup>

To be sure, Kenney's use of aircraft in this manner was not new. It did, however, represent another example of his flexibility with regard to air warfare. The potential for using aircraft to carry ground troops had been clearly demonstrated even prior to America's entry into World War II. Kenney knew that German transports had been used to carry ground soldiers from Africa to Spain during the Spanish Civil War and was convinced that the air movement of troops and supplies was "definitely a part of modern warfare."<sup>109</sup> Many other air officers, in contrast, had very undeveloped ideas about air transportation and neglected this aspect of air power.<sup>110</sup> For example, the production forecast of the number of aircraft required to defeat the Axis powers, while generally accurate, seriously underestimated the number of air transports that would be required. The planners had predicated 2, 560 air transports would be

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<sup>107</sup> Kenney diary, September 11, 12, 15, 1942, KP; Message, Ritchie to Marshall, September 21, 1942, Arnold Papers; Milner, pp. 92-95.

<sup>108</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 99; David M. Horner, Crisis of Command (Canberra: Australian National University, 1978), pp. 164, 169.

<sup>109</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," pp. 21-22.

<sup>110</sup> Wilson, interview with Ahmann, p. 149.

required--only about a quarter of the force strength eventually attained by the Army Air Forces in World War II.<sup>111</sup>

Kenney's belief in the benefits of airlifting ground forces was quickly translated into plans to put American forces on the northern coast of New Guinea. While the Australians maintained pressure on the main Japanese force on the Kokoda Trail, the American forces would turn their flank through the air.<sup>112</sup> In mid-September Whitehead flew some reconnaissance missions and recommended moving a division by air to the forward landing strips behind the Japanese advance.<sup>113</sup> Kenney also knew that the Australians had cleared an airstrip at a spot called Wanigela Mission in July in preparation for MacArthur's original plan to secure New Guinea, and a second airstrip was found when a missionary told officials about an heretofore unknown grass landing area at Fasari.<sup>114</sup> Wanigela was a good forward location from which to attack the Japanese landing site at Buna, but Kenney had difficulty convincing members of MacArthur's staff who were afraid of the difficulty this airlift would mean for supplying the forces. According to Kenney, they thought the plan for an air movement was "reckless and irresponsible."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Futrell, Ideas, p. 178.

<sup>112</sup> Kenney diary, September 29, 1942, KP.

<sup>113</sup> Goldstein, "Aerospace Pioneer," pp. 112-113.

<sup>114</sup> Kenney diary, August 2, 1942, KP; Milner, pp. 105-107, 115-118; Franzwa, pp. 130-136.

<sup>115</sup> Kenney diary, September 29, 1942, KP. Other comments about using the Wanigela on September 18, 24, 1942.

Not all of the officers in the command were as stubborn as the headquarters staff. General Blamey, the Allied Land Forces commander, and General Harding, the head of the 32nd Division, portions of which Kenney had flown to Port Moresby, both appreciated the possibilities of using airlifted troops to defeat the Japanese force at Buna.<sup>116</sup> While many other officers advocated this maneuver, it was Kenney's support for the airlift that was the most important in swaying MacArthur. With most of the staff against him, Kenney began in early August to talk with MacArthur about the benefits behind such a move. After several meetings, and no doubt many informal discussions, Kenney convinced MacArthur of the viability of the airlift option and MacArthur approved the plan on September 24, 1942.<sup>117</sup> In early October the outflanking movement began when an infantry battalion was flown into Wanigela Mission, followed a week later by an infantry regiment.<sup>118</sup> Kenney oversaw the operation in Australia, again borrowing civil aircraft from the Australian airlines to provide enough transports, while Whitehead managed things in New Guinea. In addition, Kenney took no chances with Japanese interference, telling Whitehead to provide fighters to escort the transports and shift bombing to the nearby Japanese airfields to prevent aircraft from taking off to attack the transports.<sup>119</sup> In the end, there was no Japanese interference and the airlift of troops went smoothly.

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<sup>116</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:115-116.

<sup>117</sup> Kenney diary, August 2, 18, September 4, 18, 24, 1942, KP.

<sup>118</sup> Milner, pp. 101-107.

<sup>119</sup> Kenney diary, October 5, 1942; December 9, 10, 1942, KP.

While Kenney airlifted American forces to Wanigela, the Japanese had already received orders to abandon their march on Port Moresby. The decision to forego the attack on Port Moresby grew out of an assessment by the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo about the overall course of the war in the south Pacific. The Japanese had made a two-pronged attack on the sea lines between the United States and Australia and had seriously dissipated their strength. It was clear that the battle on Guadalcanal was going badly. The attack on the eastern coast of New Guinea at Milne Bay had failed and the airlift of troops into New Guinea threatened the advance to Port Moresby. In addition, the air attacks on the Japanese supply lines had left the forces desperately short of rations and "seriously diminished front-line combat strength."<sup>120</sup> In order to concentrate their efforts in one spot, Imperial Headquarters shifted the reinforcements scheduled for New Guinea to Guadalcanal and ordered the Japanese forces near Port Moresby to retreat to the beachhead near Buna.<sup>121</sup> The Japanese retreated to well-defended areas around the area of Buna and Gona on the northern coast of New Guinea where the swamps, jungle, rain, and heat made the area an ideal defensive location. It would take several more months of fighting to finally control the area.

Whatever the effects of Kenney's operations, it was clear that he had quickly gained MacArthur's confidence. In early September, MacArthur wrote, "It has been

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<sup>120</sup> "Lessons from New Guinea Operations, Jul 42-Apr 43," Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) Enemy Publications Number 285, January 18, 1945, pp. 13-14, quoted in Reports of MacArthur, 2:160, fn. 118.

<sup>121</sup> Milner, pp. 98-100.



little more than a month since you assumed command of the air component of this area. The improvement in its performance has been marked and is directly attributable to your splendid and effective leadership."<sup>122</sup> MacArthur was equally laudatory in a message he sent to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall: "General Kenney with splendid efficiency has vitalized the air force and with the energetic support of his two fine Field Commanders, Whitehead and Walker, is making remarkable progress."<sup>123</sup> "From unsatisfactory," he continued, "the air force has already progressed to very good and will soon be excellent. In comparatively few weeks I confidently expect it to be superior."<sup>124</sup> Not surprisingly, at the end of September MacArthur recommended Kenney be promoted to Lieutenant General stating, "General Kenney has demonstrated superior qualities of leadership and professional ability."<sup>125</sup>

Kenney's impact was also noted by outside observers to the region. In late September, General Arnold arrived in Australia to observe conditions in the Pacific and explain to the commanders their part in the Allied plans for the war. Arnold told Kenney that he would send replacement aircraft and aircrews to MacArthur's theater, but that no additional aircraft could be allocated to the Southwest Pacific. While MacArthur debated Arnold about the need for more aircraft, he also sang Kenney's

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<sup>122</sup> Letter, MacArthur to Kenney, September 6, 1942, KP.

<sup>123</sup> Message, MacArthur to Marshall, September 16, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Draft message, Chief of Staff, SWPA to War Department, September 30, 1942, KP.

praises.<sup>126</sup> Arnold was already convinced of Kenney's value, "He is a real leader," Arnold wrote, "and has the finest bunch of pilots I have seen."<sup>127</sup> A member of the War Department staff who accompanied Arnold on the trip observed that the "air team of Kenney, Whitehead and Walker is obtaining results that boosted the morale of all except the Japanese. Coordination between GHQ and Air Forces leaves nothing to be desired."<sup>128</sup>

The airlift of American forces and the Japanese retreat to the northern coast of New Guinea in October 1942 marked the beginning of siege warfare. American and Australian forces inched through rancid swamps and steaming jungles towards the Japanese positions at Buna and Gona. The Japanese were not easily defeated. They had established extensive defensive strongpoints using coconut logs to build bunkers from which they cut down the advancing Allied troops. Although MacArthur was anxious to eliminate the Japanese presence, the fighting in the area lasted until the end of January 1943.<sup>129</sup>

During this phase of the fighting Kenney's missions remained much the same. His forces continued to bomb the Japanese airfields and these efforts, coupled with the fighting at Guadalcanal, gradually reduced the Japanese air activity.<sup>130</sup> The growing

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<sup>126</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 112-114.

<sup>127</sup> Henry H. Arnold Journal, "Trip to Southwest Pacific," p. 15, Arnold Papers, LOC.

<sup>128</sup> Message, Ritchie to Marshall, September 21, 1942, Arnold Papers, LOC.

<sup>129</sup> Milner, pp. 140-143.

<sup>130</sup> Watson, p. 99.

Allied supremacy in the skies, and feverish construction activity on the ground which increased the number of airfields around Port Moresby, allowed Kenney to base seven fighter and two bomber squadrons forward in New Guinea by the beginning of November 1942.<sup>131</sup>

### **Airfields and Engineers**

Developing airfields remained an on-going concern for Kenney and was a problem that had received little attention prior to the war. In World War I, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s, airfields had been just that--fields. All that a pilot needed to land and take off safely was a relatively flat surface with few obstructions to fly over. With the advent of faster, heavier, and more sophisticated aircraft came a concomitant need for longer runways, stronger materials, and all-weather facilities. Attributes found in a natural setting, according to one engineer, "only under special conditions."<sup>132</sup> The potential problems posed by the new aircraft were emphasized on May 6, 1941 when the first XB-19, an experimental heavy bomber built by Douglas aircraft, taxied out of its hanger in Santa Monica, California. The aircraft promptly sank one foot into the pavement and could not takeoff until the end of June when a concrete runway was ready.<sup>133</sup> Clearly engineers needed to do more research on the stress and strain these giant aircraft would place on landing surfaces.

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<sup>131</sup> Craven and Cate, 4: 118.

<sup>132</sup> Major R. E. Smyser, Jr., "Airdromes for War," The Military Engineer 33 (December 1941):562.

<sup>133</sup> Lenore Fine and Jesse A. Remington, The Corps of Engineers: Construction in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1972), pp. 614-615.

While there were problems in building runways in the United States suited to the new aircraft, engineers also wrestled with the problem of designing forward airfields that could be used on a temporary basis in wartime. For most of the 1920s and 1930s the national military policy of the United States was almost purely defensive and there was no need for expertise in rapidly building airfields in some distant area. Beginning in 1939, in response to events in Europe and the general buildup of the American military, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Air Corps began studying the problems involved with building airfields in forward areas and formed the first specialized aviation engineer unit in June 1940.<sup>134</sup> By the time Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941 there had been considerable effort expended in studying the requirements for air bases in forward areas. Officers had studied the war in Europe and developed plans for building dispersal parking areas for concealing aircraft and earthen revetments for protecting them from air attack. The organization and equipment needed by the aviation engineers had also received some attention, and planners realized that these units would require more and heavier equipment, such as tractors, rollers, and graders, than was found in a general engineering unit. While wartime experiences would bring adjustments in almost every area, this work created a starting point for building airfields.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Colonel Stuart C. Godfrey, "Engineers with the Army Air Forces," The Military Engineer, 33 (November 1941): 487-488; Blance D. Coll, and Jean E. Keith, and Herbert H. Rosenthal, The Corps of Engineers: Troops and Equipment (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1958), p. 18.

<sup>135</sup> Godfrey, pp. 487-488; Smyser, pp. 562-566; Major General Henry H. Arnold, "The Air Forces and Military Engineers," The Military Engineer 33 (December 1941): 548; Coll, pp. 25-26, 53-63.

Aviation engineers had played an important, indeed critical role, since the beginning of the war in the Pacific. Unlike the situation in Europe where there was at least some existing infrastructure to support air operations, in the Southwest Pacific everything had to be built from scratch. The war in the Southwest Pacific was termed by General MacArthur, an "engineers war."<sup>136</sup> Without the construction feats performed by the engineers it would have been impossible to fight the war. They had to build every airfield, road, port, and storage area that was used in the fighting in New Guinea.

Concern over construction of the airfields was a long-running problem for Kenney and Whitehead. Although they were responsible for air operations and were dependent on having airfields, they exercised no control over the engineers in the theater. The responsibility for constructing the airfields fell to MacArthur's engineering officer, Major General Hugh "Pat" Casey, a member of MacArthur's staff who had been evacuated from the Philippines.<sup>137</sup> Kenney made repeated efforts to gain control over the aviation engineers, and often decried their use on what were, in his opinion, nonessential projects. Casey retained control over the engineers by arguing that there were too few engineers in the Southwest Pacific to divide them. It was better, he believed, to pool the equipment, manpower, and expertise of the engineers on whatever the highest priority project, as defined by MacArthur, rather

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<sup>136</sup> Douglas MacArthur, quoted in William C. Baldwin, "Engineers in the Southwest Pacific, 1941-1944," The Military Engineer 83 (March-April 1993):76; Spector, p. 299.

<sup>137</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, Army Air Forces in World War II, vol. 7, Services Around the World (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 277-278.

than wasting their efforts in areas that were not absolutely essential to wartime operations.<sup>138</sup> Casey was especially wary of letting Kenney get his hands on the aviation engineers and was convinced that once the aviation engineers had completed their work on the airfields, Kenney would use them for "building Air Force clubs" and permanent living facilities when they could have been employed on more worthwhile projects.<sup>139</sup> Casey also believed that Kenney's parochial views towards airfield construction caused the airmen to disregard the need for ports, pipelines, and roads which were essential in bringing supplies to the airfields.<sup>140</sup>

Selecting the actual site for an airfield was a process that involved, ideally, both air commanders and engineers. While it did not always work out that way, there was a method to the process and it did not rely, as the official Air Force History contends, just on "common sense and the luck or skill of the surveying parties."<sup>141</sup> Selecting potential airfields, and other engineering operations, depended on good intelligence about the terrain. Data on terrain, weather, and building materials were collected from aerial photographs, interviews with pre-war residents of an area, reports from captured prisoners and documents and published by the Allied Geographical Section in monographs and in the engineer annexes that accompanied

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<sup>138</sup> Hugh J. Casey, Engineer Memoirs Major General Hugh J. Casey, U. S. Army (Washington, D. C.: Office of History, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1993), pp. 196-197.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. Quote on p. 196.

<sup>140</sup> Casey, pp. 191-192.

<sup>141</sup> Craven and Cate, 7:278.

any proposed plan. If possible, engineers also made a ground survey which often proved the most helpful in determining possible landing sites.<sup>142</sup>

In selecting a possible location for an airfield, air commanders and engineers had to balance several competing criteria. For safe landings and takeoffs the area should be as free as possible of obstructions that would require pilots to pull up sharply after takeoff or dive at the runway when landing. It was also important for the potential runway areas to be relatively flat, aligned within 10 to 15 degrees of the prevailing winds in the area, and long enough to accommodate the type of aircraft that would be using the field. Larger, heavier bombers required more runway to takeoff and land than did smaller, lighter planes.<sup>143</sup> Critically important for an airfield was the composition of soil in the area. Some areas were simply too close to the water table to be able to support the weight of any aircraft.<sup>144</sup>

Once the potential area for the airfield was agreed upon by the air commander and the engineer, construction of the runways began. After surveying the field and marking the runway, the area was cleared and the top layer of soil removed. Taking off the top layer of soil was especially important for laying runways in the jungles because that soil was usually a black loam that could not support much weight. An

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<sup>142</sup> Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters Army Forces, Pacific, Engineers of the Southwest Pacific, vol. 3, Engineer Intelligence (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 46-47, 80-84.

<sup>143</sup> Lieutenant Colonel William J. Ellison, "Airdrome Construction in the Southwest Pacific," Aviation Engineer Notes, June 1944, p. 2, COE V-25-17; Captain Everette E. Frazier, "Experiences on the location of airdromes in New Guinea," p. 5, file 733.01 HRA; Casey, p. 148.

<sup>144</sup> Frazier, "Experiences," pp. 5-6; Casey, pp. 148-149; Office of the Chief Engineer, "Technical Memorandum Number 8," February 23, 1944, COE X-117-1.

engineer who failed to remove that layer found it impossible to pile enough material on top to support the weight of heavier aircraft. The landing area was leveled and, depending on the characteristics of the subsoil, material such as gravel or coral was brought in to make the foundation of the field firmer. Usually the field was then covered with flexible pavements, asphalt, a thin coating of asphalt oil, or pierced steel planking, called PSP or Marston matting, which gave the fields a limited all weather capability.<sup>145</sup> The firmness or resistance of the soil was important when using these flexible pavements because they did not support the weight of the aircraft like concrete, but transferred the weight to the earth underneath. If the soil or subgrade was weak and unstable, as it was with some materials such as clay, silt, and sand, the surface would buckle and bend rapidly, making it unusable.<sup>146</sup>

### On the Offensive

Although the airfield construction program in New Guinea had made some progress during the fall of 1942, Kenney was still dissatisfied by the condition of the runways and their number. In October he complained to MacArthur that he might have to send two fighter squadrons back to Australia because runways were unusable because of rainfall.<sup>147</sup> Kenney needed more air strips because, despite some success,

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<sup>145</sup> Ellison, "Airdrome Construction," p. 3; Brigadier General Samuel D. Stugis, "Air Power as Affected by Airdrome Construction," The Military Engineer 40 (September 1948): 417.

<sup>146</sup> Fine, pp. 620-621, 625-630; Karl C. Dod, The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Japan (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), pp. 218-219.

<sup>147</sup> Kenney diary, October 18, 31, 1942; Dod, pp. 184-188, 220.



Japanese aircraft still affected Allied operations. Throughout November, Japanese aircraft bombed ships bringing supplies to Allied ground forces, scoring their biggest success on November 16, 1942, when they sank four of the five supply ships assigned to the 32nd Division, delaying a planned advance by several weeks.<sup>148</sup> In December, the Japanese bombed American forward positions, including a field hospital, and the airfield at Dobodura. In addition, the Japanese were able to air drop supplies to their ground forces.<sup>149</sup> Though Kenney's efforts were certainly effective in reducing Japanese capabilities, both sides still battled over control of the air.

Kenney's efforts to hit the Japanese resupply ships gradually attained greater successes. After their retreat, the Japanese made several attempts to reinforce the Buna beachhead, and while Allied air force attacks succeeded in stopping some ships from the landing, other air missions were less successful. Using several destroyers, the Japanese shuttled 2,300 troops from Rabaul to Buna from November 17 to 21. Although attacked by Allied aircraft, none of the strikes was successful.<sup>150</sup> Allied success on shipping, however, soon began to improve. Four destroyers left Rabaul on November 28 carrying a brigade of 720 soldiers to reinforce the Japanese positions near Buna. The next day the convoy was attacked and two destroyers were damaged and the convoy was forced to return to Rabaul. After some repairs, the destroyers left

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<sup>148</sup> Milner, pp. 169-170, 198-199; Morison, 6:47.

<sup>149</sup> December 11, 1942, KP; Letters, Robert L. Eichelberger to Richard Sutherland, December 4, 7, 8, 1942, Robert L. Eichelberger Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>150</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:174-175.

Rabaul on November 30 and arrived near Gona on December 1. Air attacks made it impossible to transfer the troops to shore, however, and the destroyers were forced to land the brigade eighteen miles away from their intended destination. Even this landing site came under attack and only 425 of the soldiers were able to go ashore. The delays inflicted on the convoy at sea, combined with the delay on land, effectively eliminated these forces from the fighting near Gona.<sup>151</sup> The last attempt by the Japanese to send reinforcements to Buna occurred on December 7 when another convoy of destroyers left Rabaul. This attempt was turned back once by air attacks and when the ships finally arrived near New Guinea, they were forced to land the soldiers forty miles away from the action.<sup>152</sup> There were many factors that went into the success of Allied aircraft after the middle of November, but the most important was the fact that a greater number of aircraft were being sent after the convoys. Although Kenney had not been able to increase the overall percentage of aircraft that were available for missions, the total number of missions flown doubled.<sup>153</sup> By the end of November Kenney had dispatched almost double the numbers sent on prior missions to attack convoys near New Guinea, increasing the likelihood that the ships would be found and sunk.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:179.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*: 179, 198, fn. 92.

<sup>153</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, pp. 14, 43. The number of missions reaching a target varied by month, but it went from 1,000 in September to at least 2,000 every month beginning in October.

<sup>154</sup> Extracted from Historical Division, Office of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Headquarters Army Air Forces, "The Bismarck Sea Action March 1-4, 1943," September 1, 1943, p. 24, file 105.1-8 HRA.

The retreat to the beachhead had effectively eliminated the Japanese supply lines on land. Thus, any support Kenney could offer the ground forces was in bombing the opposing enemy forces directly. Kenney was personally opposed to such missions. He felt strongly that aircraft should be used against large targets in the rear areas where they would affect the overall objective of the campaign and not "frittered" away as artillery.<sup>155</sup> Kenney maintained that using aircraft in this manner may help win a battle, but it could also "result in losing the war"<sup>156</sup> through attrition (such missions in close support of the ground forces translated to higher loss rates) and because each plane would destroy less of the enemy resources per mission. Despite these misgivings, he ordered attacks on the front line Japanese forces during the months of siege warfare when Allied forces tried to force the Japanese from their positions near Buna.

The efforts in close air support missions were hampered by a number of problems. Some of the aircraft that might be used for such missions were still trying to wrest control of the air from the Japanese.<sup>157</sup> In addition, the jungle foliage and terrain made it difficult to find and hit targets, Kenney's pilots had little training in bombing close to friendly forces, and there were few established procedures for air to ground liaison or communication.<sup>158</sup> Maps of the area were almost nonexistent,

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<sup>155</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," pp. 18, 22.

<sup>156</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," p. 18.

<sup>157</sup> It was not clear to the participants that the Allies had gained control of the air at this time. Spector, Eagle, p. 215, argues that the air battle was over by this time.

<sup>158</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:126-127; Milner, pp. 375-376; Eichelberger, p. 40; Nicola Baker, More Than Little Heroes: Australian Army Air Liaison Officers in the Second World War, Canberra Studies

making it difficult for both pilots and soldiers to communicate their positions, let alone find and hit the enemy.<sup>159</sup> Some efforts were made at improving the missions, such as establishing exact times for attacks, providing better methods for signaling the location of friendly ground forces, and exchanging liaison officers between ground and air headquarters were eventually introduced, but pilots still bombed at the wrong time, missed the target, or worse, hit American soldiers.<sup>160</sup> General Robert Eichelberger, who took over command of the American forces in New Guinea in early December found "such lamentable incidents . . . dispiriting" to his troops.<sup>161</sup> Kenney's attitude also affected the priority and importance attached to this type of mission. He simply did not believe close air support was the most effective use of his aircraft. He might have felt compelled to use them in this role since the aircraft were available, but the Japanese did not have to move their supplies overland and had halted their shipments by sea, eliminating the targets he would have preferred to attack. One can only guess at the success that the missions in direct support of the ground forces might have achieved had Kenney chosen to be as innovative and flexible on this front as he was in interdiction and airlift.

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on Strategy and Defence number 106 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 1994), pp. 47-66; Joe Gray Taylor, "American Experience in the Southwest Pacific," in Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support, ed. Benjamin Franklin Cooling, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1990), p. 305.

<sup>159</sup> Engineers, 3:29.

<sup>160</sup> Milner, pp. 177-178, 182, 185, 285; Craven and Cate, 4:125-127; John F. Shortal, Forged by Fire: General Robert L. Eichelberger (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>161</sup> Eichelberger, p. 40. One notable friendly fire incident involved the death of Byron Darnton, a reporter from the New York Times, Eichelberger, pp. 66-67; Milner, p. 108.

Flying supplies into an airfield had become fairly routine and, after the Japanese retreat, airfields were developed near the front lines at Buna and Dobodura for resupplying the ground troops. Kenney even accepted the challenge of flying in heavy equipment like 105mm howitzers, with all the associated equipment, to the forward positions.<sup>162</sup> The biggest handicap to these operations proved to be the bad weather in New Guinea. Low clouds not only prevented aircraft from landing at the forward airfields, but also made dropping supplies into an area difficult since pilots needed to see the ground to determine the location of the drop area. Kenney sanctioned experiments with a system that used a radio signal to provide the location of the drop area, but by the end of November bad weather, and a lousy distribution system, had reduced supplies at the front lines to a minimum level. Fortunately, the weather broke and the supplies were flown in.<sup>163</sup> Kenney, however, was determined to prevent the reoccurrence of such an episode and again borrowed air transports from the Australians in an effort to build up the level of supplies in the forward areas.<sup>164</sup>

Although the amount of cargo transported from Australia to New Guinea by sea greatly exceeded the amount that was flown in (2,450 tons by air versus 8,560 tons by ship), during the critical period in November and early December, however, airlift proved to be the most important source of supplies.<sup>165</sup> General Eichelberger

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<sup>162</sup> Kenney diary, November 11, 1942; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 14, 1942, KP.

<sup>163</sup> Kenney diary, November 20, 1942, KP; Letter, Kenney to Fairchild, p. 2; Shortal, p. 50.

<sup>164</sup> Message, Kenney to Chief of Air Staff, RAAF, Message, Kenney to Secretary, Air Board, December 9, 1942, KP.

<sup>165</sup> Milner, p. 375; Shortal, p. 50.

remarked, "Both Australian and American ground forces would have perished without 'George Kenney's Air.'"<sup>166</sup> The single most successful day for aerial resupply was December 14, 1942, when 74 flights moved 178 tons of supplies from Port Moresby to Popondetta, near Buna.<sup>167</sup> In addition to moving material from Australia to New Guinea, Kenney's air transports were also delivering supplies from the main bases in New Guinea to forward locations. By the beginning of December air transports were delivering two million pounds a week to sites all over New Guinea.<sup>168</sup> The transports also provided valuable in evacuating the sick and wounded from the battlefields. During the heaviest fighting in December and early January, transports moved over 100 soldiers a day. In the American 32nd Division, 2,530 sick and 991 wounded soldiers were able to leave the combat area in aircraft.<sup>169</sup> How many of these men were saved because they could be airlifted out rather than moved by other means is unclear. At the very least it must have provided a morale boost to the soldiers fighting on the ground.

Another important, but probably less appreciated, role of air power during this first campaign was reconnaissance. Reconnaissance missions flown by the 8th Photo Reconnaissance Squadron, flying especially configured P-38s, produced photographs that were used for finding the location of enemy forces and for constructing maps, an

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<sup>166</sup> Eichelberger, p. 34.

<sup>167</sup> Milner, p. 255.

<sup>168</sup> December 10, 1942, KP.

<sup>169</sup> Watson, "Papua," p. 80.

essential task in an area of the world that was largely uncharted. In addition, long-range bombers, such as the B-17, were essential for locating ship movements and convoys in the expansive ocean areas of the Southwest Pacific.<sup>170</sup>

The fierce fighting on the ground in Papua, New Guinea, continued until the end of January, 1943, when the last Japanese positions were overrun. The efforts of "Kenney's Air" against Japanese air forces and shipping, might have been largely invisible to the infantryman and his company commander lying in the mud or slogging through the swamps trying to reduce these last Japanese strong points, but were undeniably important in the overall battle. In slowly gaining some control over the skies of New Guinea and eroding the ability of the Japanese to resupply their combat forces, Kenney's flyers reduced the ability of the Japanese to resist the Allied ground advance. By driving away the Japanese air threat, more Allied aircraft could be devoted to ground support, ships could bring supplies forward without fear of being attacked, and, conversely, Japanese shipping was greatly reduced.

The effects of Kenney's efforts were readily apparent to the Japanese soldiers. By the end of December their normal daily ration of rice was cut from 28 ounces to 10 ounces and a few weeks later there was no rice left. The positions captured by American forces showed the undeniable effects of this effort to cut-off Japanese supplies--many of the Japanese soldiers were starving and some had resorted to cannibalism. Allied air efforts had also kept the Japanese forces desperately short of

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<sup>170</sup> Engineers, 3:27-28, 57-59; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 78.

weapons and medical supplies.<sup>171</sup> There is no doubt that it took hard, bloody fighting by infantrymen on the ground to clear the area of Japanese forces, but those same enemy forces, adequately supplied and fed, would have been a much more formidable threat and probably would have exacted a greater cost in American and Australian lives. Major Koiwai Mituso, a battalion commander in the Papuan campaign, attributed the Japanese loss directly to air power. "We lost at Buna," Koiwai said, "because we could not retain air superiority, because we could not supply our troops, and because our navy and air force could not disrupt the enemy supply line."<sup>172</sup>

Prior to the war, Kenney had read reports on the Japanese use of air power in China. These reports demonstrated to him that "The Japanese have a lot of fairly good airplanes and considerable aeronautical equipment" but, he had concluded, "they do not seem to have a clear conception of the proper role of the Air Force."<sup>173</sup> The air warfare he observed in the Papua campaign did little to change Kenney's perceptions about the ability of the Japanese to understand air power. He told Arnold that the Japanese "fleet and his army can hold their own in any league but he simply cannot train airmen to compare with ours in a hurry. His original highly trained crews were superb but they are dead."<sup>174</sup> The newly trained Japanese pilots could not fly at night or in bad weather, and, despite their previous successes against American flyers,

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<sup>171</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:183; Milner, pp. 346, 374.

<sup>172</sup> Quoted in Milner, p. 374, also see pp. 144-146.

<sup>173</sup> Kenney, "Modern," p. 22.

<sup>174</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, 1 January 1943, p. 2, KP.



Kenney wrote that he believed the Japanese victories were the result of courage, not skill, a statement that reflected his prejudice more than the reality of the situation.<sup>175</sup> Although the experience and training levels of the Japanese pilots were starting to diminish, in 1942 they were, for the most part, still highly skilled and the number of flying hours they received in training was on par with the American pilots. In addition, at the beginning of the war Japanese pilots had superior equipment and better tactics which they used to great advantage. While most this elite group was later lost, in late 1942 Kenney was underestimating his competition.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, Kenney panned the Japanese commanders in the way they used their aircraft, concluding they "did not know how to use...air decisively."<sup>177</sup> Kenney believed that the Japanese had squandered their opportunity in late 1942 to eliminate his aircraft from New Guinea. Instead of sending over repeated, large-sized attacks that could wipe out Kenney's air fleet, the Japanese continued to make attacks, but they were small in size, intermittent, and they never focused on a single target long enough to have any lasting impact.<sup>178</sup>

Although Kenney disparaged the Japanese air commanders, he did develop a grudging respect for their fighting ability in other areas. When he first arrived in Australia, Kenney had a low opinion of the Japanese soldier, but after several months

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<sup>175</sup> Arnold, Global Mission, p. 382.

<sup>176</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 34-36, 40. For a personal account of the training and experience a Japanese pilot brought to war in 1942 against American aircrews in the Southwest Pacific see, Sakai Saburo with Martin Caidin and Fred Saito, Samuri! (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Inc., 1978).

<sup>177</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 69.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

of fighting, he had revised his view. He was now convinced that the Japanese soldier was "the toughest fighter in the world" and that Americans, himself included, had underrated their fighting ability.<sup>179</sup> Expressing the prejudice of many an American soldier at that time, he argued that, the Japanese soldier was "undoubtedly a low order of humanity but he has the sense to use the weapons of war and do a good job at it."<sup>180</sup> Japanese men joined the army, he asserted, to indulge their "liking for looting, arson, massacre, and rape."<sup>181</sup> The fanaticism and strength of the Japanese ground forces, in combination with the weaknesses he observed from their air force, led Kenney to conclude: "The Japanese weakness and our real hope for victory is in the air."<sup>182</sup>

## Conclusion

By the end of Papuan campaign in January 1943, Kenney could take pride in a number of accomplishments in his effort to defeat the Japanese from the air. He had revitalized the air organization and infused it with capable, energetic officers. His new organizational structure made the Australians responsible for defensive chores, such as air defense and anti-submarine patrolling, while the Americans concentrated

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<sup>179</sup> Letter Uncle George to Dorothy Glazier, February 10, 1943, I am grateful to Dorothy Dodson for sharing this letter with me; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, p. 1, KP. His impressions on first going to New Guinea are recorded in Kenney, Reports, p. 92.

<sup>180</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, p. 2, KP.

<sup>181</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, p. 2, KP.

<sup>182</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, KP.

on offensive tasks in New Guinea and in support of the south Pacific fighting in the Solomon Islands. Kenney's advanced echelon headquarters at Port Moresby under his deputy, Ennis Whitehead, focused on daily combat operations with little or no responsibility for administrative requirements, leaving Kenney to work on improving the availability of aircraft and planning future operations.

Kenney felt that the Papuan campaign represented a model for future warfare in the Southwest Pacific. "The whole show has been a demonstration of how the war will be fought in this theater," he told Hap Arnold.<sup>183</sup> Although Kenney's belief in the effectiveness of air power was important in his vision of future campaigns, he also noted that the geographic conditions in the theater were a key factor. Military operations in the Pacific area, he told Arnold, depended on the control of islands which were "nothing more or less than aerodromes...from which modern fire-power is launched."<sup>184</sup> While some of these locations were true islands, the jungle terrain and inaccessibility of the interior regions of the large land masses in the Pacific, such as New Guinea, meant that military forces were concentrated in relatively small areas making "all warfare . . . island warfare."<sup>185</sup> Kenney intended to fight future campaigns according to the following formula:

- (1) Get [air] control over the battle area.
  - (2) Put an air blockade around the enemy forces in that area so that they get no more supplies or reinforcements.
  - (3) Hammer the enemy positions, supply installations, and troops with constant air attack.
  - (4) Cover and assist our own troops in destroying the enemy forces.
- Our own ground assault preferably should be from the rear or undefended

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<sup>183</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, December 10, 1942, KP.

<sup>184</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, October 24, 1942, quoted in Craven and Cate, 4:119.

<sup>185</sup> "Notes to discuss with General Arnold," September 24, 1942, KP.

flank. Frontal assaults only in case the air hammering has practically destroyed the enemy. (5) Occupy the territory, build airdromes on it and advance the bomber line some more.<sup>186</sup>

This formula would hold true during the coming months as MacArthur's forces advanced up the northern coast of New Guinea.

The success of Kenney's air units and his own personality had also forged a close association with MacArthur. This combination of confidence and trust allowed Kenney to enter MacArthur's inner circle and became a key advisor. For his part, MacArthur also realized he had undergone a "conversion" of sorts. In early December 1942, he told Eddie Rickenbacker, a World War I ace and then President of Eastern Air Lines, "I probably did the American Air Forces more harm than any man living when I was chief of staff by refusing to believe in the future of the airplane as a weapon of war. I am now doing everything I can to make amends for that great mistake."<sup>187</sup> The next months would demonstrate the degree to which MacArthur had embraced the aircraft as a weapon of war.

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<sup>186</sup> Kenney diary, December 16, 1942. KP.

<sup>187</sup> Edward V. Rickenbacker, Rickenbacker. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 332-333; James, II: 281.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Moving westward, January 1943 to September 1943**

**"I am having an interesting time inventing new ways to win a war on a shoe string"<sup>1</sup>**

The end of the fighting in Papua, New Guinea marked the beginning of a new stage in the war. The defeat of the Japanese at Buna and Guadalcanal shifted the initiative for operations and the Allies now dictated the pace and scope of the war. Allied military operations also changed with the addition of more forces and the introduction of amphibious warfare. While Kenney had worked with the Allied Naval Commander during the first six months, the coming year would see the increased integration of air, land, and sea, forces. Overall, the operational template that Kenney forecast at the end of the 1942 held true: gain air control of the battle area, isolate the enemy ground forces, and assist friendly ground forces during their assault against enemy positions. The aim of all these operations was the same--gain airfields from which Kenney's airmen could move forward and begin the next round of attacks.

Operations in the Southwest Pacific during 1943 were defined by the parameters laid down during the Casablanca conference in January between President

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Kenney to Fairchild, December 8, 1942, KP.

Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill and their respective military advisors. Most of the meeting focused on the war in Europe, with the leaders deciding to continue the strategic air offensive against Germany and committing the ground forces then fighting in North Africa to an invasion of Italy to secure control of the Mediterranean Sea. Although the strategy of "Europe first" meant that the majority of the forces would be committed against Germany and Italy, American military leaders argued that forces in the Pacific could not simply stay on the defensive; limited offensive operations were needed to keep pressure on the Japanese forces. American strategists proposed that the advances toward Rabaul that had started in the south Pacific be continued. The British reluctantly agreed, although there was no consensus on the amount of forces that should be sent to the Pacific.<sup>2</sup>

Rabaul, located on the northern end of the island of New Britain, continued to menace all future military operations in the area. The bay at Rabaul was an excellent anchorage and one of the many harbors inside the bay could hold at least 300,000 tons of shipping, making it an excellent naval base. The five Japanese airfields, which held varying numbers of aircraft, and the 367 anti-aircraft guns provided a stout defense against air attacks.<sup>3</sup> As they had demonstrated in their attacks on Buna and Guadalcanal, Japanese air, sea, and ground forces staging from Rabaul could easily attack positions that threatened the sea lines between the United States and Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Matloff, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), pp. 18-33.

<sup>3</sup> USSBS, The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 12-13; Odgers, p. 91.

Defeating Japan, and recapturing the Philippines, would only be possible if Rabaul was eliminated as a Japanese stronghold.<sup>4</sup> Before reaching Rabaul, however, MacArthur's forces would have to secure positions further west in New Guinea.

The Japanese commanders at Rabaul well-understood the strategic value of their position--that was why they had captured the area in the first place--and after the losses in Papua and Guadalcanal, made plans to reinforce their positions in New Guinea to thwart the Allied advance and protect the Rabaul stronghold.<sup>5</sup> The 18th Army under General Adachi was assigned the task of defending Lae and Salamaua on the north coast of New Guinea and eliminating the Australian force operating near Wau. Critical to stopping any buildup of the Japanese forces in New Guinea, which would delay the Allied advance, was stopping Japanese shipping bringing troops and supplies from Rabaul. Kenney was convinced that he could do so and told MacArthur that his newest innovation, was ready to stop the enemy advance.<sup>6</sup>

### **Innovation**

The low priority of aircraft and supplies in the Southwest Pacific meant that Kenney and his commanders had to get the most out of every aircraft they possessed. One of the ways Kenney extracted this combat power was by encouraging innovative

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<sup>4</sup> John Miller, Jr., Cartwheel: The Reduction of Rabaul (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, pp. 32-35.

<sup>6</sup> Kenney diary, December 16, 1942, KP; Miller, pp. 30-36; Craven and Cate, 4:135.

combat methods and repairs. Salvaging every possible item from a wrecked aircraft, even if it was downed in Japanese territory, soon became routine in every part of Fifth Air Force.<sup>7</sup> Mechanics also learned to improvise and used any available material for repairs. Two of the more colorful examples were using Australian sixpence coins in the engine magnetos and substituting Kotex for air filters.<sup>8</sup> When Kenney was shown a device for testing aircraft instruments built out of scrap parts he ordered several more to be built.<sup>9</sup> Kenney's efforts slowly paid dividends. Although the percentage of mission capable aircraft only rose very gradually, as did the total number of aircraft in the theater, the number of missions flown jumped dramatically from about 1,000 in the month of September to over 4,000 in December 1942. Although a variety of conditions affected the number of missions flown, the total number was never less than 2,000 per month.<sup>10</sup>

Kenney also changed tactics and methods in order to adapt to the local conditions. He had shifted from high-altitude to low-altitude attacks on shipping, started using night attacks, and developed long-range fuel tanks to provide fighters the range to escort bombers. Kenney's flexibility was also evidenced by the technical changes made to aircraft in his command. To sink merchant shipping, mechanics

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<sup>7</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 56-57, 71-73.

<sup>8</sup> Air Evaluation Board, SWPA, "Air Transport Operations, Battle of Wau," June 10, 1945, p. 12-13, file 706.310 HRA.

<sup>9</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 56-57.

<sup>10</sup> Extracted from USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 14, 43; "Aircraft Attrition--Southwest Pacific Area," July 15, 1943, file 706.215 HRA.



modified B-25s into "commerce destroyers" with the addition of four fifty caliber guns in the nose and an upper turret with two fifty caliber guns.<sup>11</sup> Captain Paul "Pappy" Gunn, one of Kenney's most interesting and innovative officers, increased the combat capability of the Douglas A-20s by putting more powerful forward firing guns into the aircraft, adding two 450 gallon fuel tanks in the bomb bay, and building a bomb rack that allowed the A-20 to carry Kenney's parafrag bomb.<sup>12</sup> To better destroy the Japanese aircraft protected by earthen revetments, Kenney had local engineers develop a fuze that would explode bombs in the air, showering the area with bomb fragments. Other bombs were wrapped with heavy wire that, when exploded, could cut through the stout protective structures built by the Japanese.<sup>13</sup>

Some of these adaptations represented ideas that Kenney had been working with for his entire career. He knew from his teaching and work on attack aviation at the Tactical School that forward-firing guns would be extremely useful in low-altitude attacks and could destroy a variety of targets. During his time at the Tactical School he had also investigated the idea of developing a bomb which would burst in the air. While his efforts at the time were unsuccessful, he had obviously not forgotten the benefits of such a weapon and sponsored efforts for a solution. Likewise, his experiences at the Engineering School and later assignments involving aircraft

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<sup>11</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:141, 154; Kenney, Reports, p. 182; Gann, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:106; Kenney, Reports, p. 76; Gann, p. 7; John Alcorn, "The Grim Reapers: 3rd Bomb Group," American Aviation Historical Society Journal 20 (Spring 1975): 12.

<sup>13</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 105-106.

development gave him insight into the advantages and disadvantages of various modifications.

Kenney seemed to relish the challenge of inventing new methods. "I am having an interesting time inventing new ways to win a war on a shoe string," he told a fellow officer.<sup>14</sup> To a friend he commented, "If I don't like the way a 'plane (sic) comes to me, or if I have a special job to do (and I have lots of them) I will fix the airplane myself and say nothing."<sup>15</sup> To be sure, Kenney did not invent every modification in his command, but as the commander he actively supported change that offered the ability to inflict more damage on the enemy. "I encourage personnel who have any ideas to go right ahead with them. It makes no difference what the man's rank or his previous experience. If he has an idea that sounds feasible he is told to go ahead and he is given every assistance."<sup>16</sup> He also remarked that "Any time I can't think of something screwy enough I have a flock of people out here to help me."<sup>17</sup> Kenney gratefully accepted changes no matter what their source, and on several occasions praised the Australians for their efforts in making changes to aircraft and

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<sup>14</sup> Letter, Kenney to Fairchild, December 8, 1942, KP.

<sup>15</sup> Letter, Kenney to Colonel Alvin Crawford, December 9, 1942, KP.

<sup>16</sup> George C. Kenney, "Air Power in the Southwest Pacific," Air Force 27 (June 1944): 59.

<sup>17</sup> Letter, Kenney to Fairchild, December 8, 1942, KP, also Kenney diary, August 5, 1942, KP.

equipment.<sup>18</sup> A sergeant in the Fifth Air Service Command was singled out for a military decoration based on "his remarkable ability to improvise equipment."<sup>19</sup>

Undoubtedly, Kenney's efforts at instilling innovation were aided by the circumstances of the situation. The lack of spare parts in the Southwest Pacific and the unceasing demand for combat aircraft put a premium on innovation and flexibility, and, to be sure, Kenney's command was not the only area in the Army Air Forces that saw enterprising individuals adapting to local conditions. But Kenney set a standard for how innovations would be accepted that was unique.<sup>20</sup> Without his support, at least in a very broad sense, many of these ideas would have never seen the light of day. In short, Kenney established the organizational parameters that allowed innovation to prosper.<sup>21</sup>

One example of the way in which innovation worked in Kenney's command concerned a new nose gun turret for the B-24. The first production models of the B-24 were extremely vulnerable to head-on attacks because they lacked an effective set of forward-firing guns. A member of Kenney's command, Colonel Arthur H. Rogers, hit on the idea of grafting the powered tail turret of the B-24 onto the nose section.

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<sup>18</sup> Letter, Kenney to Group Captain Wackett, President Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, December 8, 1942; Letter, Kenney to Secretary, Air Board, December 30, 1942, Subject: Flying-Officer Snooker, December 30, 1942, KP.

<sup>19</sup> "History of the Fifth Air Service Command," p. 42, file 733.01 HRA.

<sup>20</sup> Caidin, pp. 316-317 for some examples of innovation in the South Pacific.

<sup>21</sup> Jane M. Howell and Christopher A. Higgins, "Champions of Change: Identifying, Understanding, and Supporting Champions of Technological Innovations," Organizational Dynamics (Summer 1990): 52-54; Richard L. Daft, Organization Theory and Design, 4th edition (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1992), pp. 271-272, 486.

Rogers first came up with the solution when he was going through B-24 training in July 1942, but the press of operations in the Southwest Pacific left him little time to lobby for the solution. In January 1943 he was able to flesh out his ideas and presented them to Brigadier General Carl Connell the commander of Fifth Air Service Command. Connell, who had known Rogers from a previous assignment, was eager to help and brought Rogers to see Kenney who enthusiastically endorsed the modification. One aircraft was modified, christened "Connell's Special," and flown by the 90th Bomb Group on a trial basis. The new nose turret proved very effective and Kenney's Air Service Command worked on modifying most of the B-24s in the Southwest Pacific.<sup>22</sup> Kenney's role in this innovation, as it was in many others, was to encourage the process and support the efforts of the people who came up with new ideas. Eventually, B-24s were manufactured with a powered turret for a nose gun, making the field modifications unnecessary. These new aircraft, however, did not arrive in the Southwest Pacific until the summer of 1944, almost a year and a half after Roger's suggestion.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, not every innovation was a success and some proved to be more problematic than others. The RAAF thought that the loss of three bombers might have been caused by Kenney's parafrag bombs that exploded just after leaving the

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<sup>22</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, Subject: Report on Modifications Recommended for B-24 Airplanes, January 14, 1943; Kenney diary, January 16, 1943, KP; John S. Alcorn, The Jolly Rogers: History of the 90th Bomb Group during World War II (Temple City, California: Historical Aviation Album, 1981), pp. 70-74.

<sup>23</sup> Alcorn, pp. 73-74, 139.

aircraft.<sup>24</sup> Some modifications required that aircraft be removed from flying status, and Whitehead often complained that the changes had not been adequately studied or were taking too long. At one point he told Kenney, "I am convinced that there is too much experimental work being done and not enough thought given to production."<sup>25</sup> Later he told Kenney, "we do not want...an installation which causes us a lot of grief later on."<sup>26</sup> In essence, with Whitehead focused so closely on daily operations, it was up to Kenney to protect and encourage the innovation process, despite the complaints he received. Even Kenney admitted that sometimes there were problems with new ideas, such as the larger ammunition box proposed by one sergeant that increased the rate of fire for the machine gun, but burned out the gun barrel at the same time. Kenney accepted these failures philosophically: "We have given ourselves lots of headaches, but we have also gotten some fine results."<sup>27</sup> Kenney's emphasis on innovation--tactical, technical, and organizational--produced just such "fine results" in March 1943 when his specially configured B-25s using low altitude attacks took part in an air-sea engagement known as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

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<sup>24</sup> Gillison, pp. 638-639.

<sup>25</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, May 19, 1943, p. 1, Ennis C. Whitehead Papers HRA.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, April 9, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>27</sup> Kenney, "Air Power," pp. 59-60.

## **Battle of the Bismarck Sea**

The attack on the convoy steaming out of Rabaul in March 1943 was part of Kenney's continuing battle to stop Japanese reinforcements to New Guinea. These battles began far from the scene of the action, however, and the most important ingredient in Kenney's success was the intelligence he received on Japanese convoys. Kenney's intelligence organization, which included a large number of Australian officers, carefully plotted the pattern of Japanese shipping and catalogued the signs which indicated an impending convoy. Generally, the Japanese would send additional aircraft to their airfields near the convoy's expected route and increase their attacks on Allied airfields to stop any air interference. Japanese floatplanes, which were used for antisubmarine patrols, would be moved forward to find Allied submarines and the Japanese would simultaneously increase their own submarine activity.<sup>28</sup> The final piece of the puzzle was figuring out when the convoy would sail and its destination. For that Kenney relied on the ULTRA information produced by MacArthur's Central Bureau to pinpoint the day of departure and the destination of the convoy. This intelligence allowed Kenney to concentrate his forces at the appropriate spot and time to have the greatest impact. Finding convoys in the large stretches of ocean in the Southwest Pacific would have been difficult or impossible without this information. Having advance warning allowed Kenney to send photo reconnaissance flights to Rabaul when they would be most effective. These photographs also served as an additional input into the intelligence equation. Likewise, having precise information

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<sup>28</sup> Kenney diary, August 11, 1942. KP: Kenney, Reports, p. 162.

about when the convoy was sailing and its destination allowed Kenney to husband his meager force of long-range aircraft. Although reconnaissance flights were still sent out, both to provide up-to-date information and to offer a plausible explanation for how the convoy was spotted without mentioning ULTRA, searching for convoys would have required many more reconnaissance patrols which meant fewer aircraft available for an attack without the signals intelligence.

A convoy in early January 1943 highlighted both the methods used in Kenney's command and some of the shortcomings, and proved to be a valuable learning experience for a more successful engagement in March. On New Year's Day 1943, aerial photographs showed a massive amount of shipping in Rabaul harbor, and two days later codebreakers intercepted a message that indicated the convoy would depart sometime around the 6th.<sup>29</sup> Kenney hoped to stop at least part of the convoy before it left the harbor and ordered Kenneth Walker, the head of Fifth Bomber Command, to make an attack at dawn on January 5th. Walker, a firm believer in the efficacy of strategic bombing and the self-defense capabilities of bombers, disagreed with Kenney's approach. Walker argued that a dawn attack meant that the bombers could not fly in formation and the dawn attack would be carried out as single aircraft. Instead, Walker wanted to attack the harbor at noon, which would allow the aircraft to strike in formation, providing proof for Walker's beliefs in the defensive abilities of the B-17. Kenney, who feared the threat of Japanese air attacks and knew that he had

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<sup>29</sup> Kenney diary, January 1, 3, 1943, KP.

no long-range fighters to accompany the bombers, was not dissuaded and overruled Walker. The bombers would strike at dawn.<sup>30</sup>

Despite Kenney's clear ruling, Walker persisted in his plan and twelve aircraft of his command attacked Rabaul around noon on January 5. Walker paid the price for his change, as he was flying in one of the two aircraft lost in the raid. In flying on the mission Walker violated two of Kenney's orders. One, of course, was the time of the attack. The other was Kenney's standing prohibition against Walker flying in combat. Kenney, who had been blasted by MacArthur for flying over enemy territory, had previously admonished Walker for flying in combat.<sup>31</sup> Kenney argued that it was more important for Walker to apply his skills, talent, and training as an air commander in planning missions so that "his outfit would take minimum losses," than flying on combat missions where he would just be "extra baggage."<sup>32</sup>

No good explanation has ever been offered for Walker's decision to go on the mission. Walker was acknowledged as a stubborn, driven man who fervently believed in unescorted, daylight bombing. This mission would have been his first opportunity to validate his teachings and he probably could not resist the temptation to fly. Walker probably also felt that as a combat leader he had a responsibility to fly in harm's way.

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<sup>30</sup> Kenney diary, January 4, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 176.

<sup>31</sup> Kenney diary, August 21, 1942; October 5, 1942, KP.

<sup>32</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 167.



There may have been other factors--the bad weather forecast for the mission, or even Walker's feelings towards Kenney--but that would be speculation.<sup>33</sup>

Walker's actions incensed Kenney and he told MacArthur that Walker would receive an official reprimand for disobeying orders on his return. MacArthur retorted, "If he doesn't come back I'll put him in for a Medal of Honor."<sup>34</sup> The search for Walker continued for many days, but there was no sign of the missing crew. On January 11, 1943, the news of Walker's loss was released and in MacArthur's recommendation for the Medal of Honor, he cited Walker's "conspicuous leadership above and beyond the call of duty."<sup>35</sup>

Walker's mission did succeed in sinking one merchant ship, but the remainder of the Japanese convoy, carrying the 102nd Infantry Regiment of the 51st Division, left Rabaul harbor on January 5, shortly after Walker's failed attack. The convoy of five transports and five destroyers proceeded towards Lae under heavy air cover provided by Japanese fighters that had been flown into airfields on the western end of New Britain and New Guinea. Although Kenney's aircraft attacked the convoy over the next several days, problems in planning and communication prevented air units from mounting mass attacks on the convoy. When smaller attacks were made, the Japanese air cover menaced the Allied bombers, making it difficult to find and hit the convoy. On January 7 one transport was struck, but 739 men of the 1,100 aboard

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<sup>33</sup> Martha Byrd, "Kenneth N. Walker: Air Power's Untempered Crusader" (unpublished manuscript), pp. 121-130. I am grateful to James Titus for sharing this manuscript with me.

<sup>34</sup> Kenney diary, January 5, 1943, KP.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Byrd, p. 139.

were rescued.<sup>36</sup> The convoy began unloading troops and supplies near Lae, but heavy air attacks on January 8 crippled another transport and the rest of the convoy was forced to leave. The convoy had been loaded with enough food for 12,000 troops for three months and half of the ammunition for a division-size engagement. In the end, only half of the supplies were transferred to land, forcing the commanders to cut rations in half immediately.<sup>37</sup> But the success had a heavy price. From Walker's attack on the January 6 until the convoy's return to Rabaul, fifty-six heavy bombers were dispatched to hit the convoy and ten were lost. Of the ninety medium bombers sent out, eleven were destroyed.<sup>38</sup>

Although diminished in strength, the Japanese forces immediately moved inland toward the detachment of Australian troops that had been operating near the town of Wau. Kenney's air units quickly turned towards stopping this Japanese advance which threatened to consolidate Japanese control of the area. Two thousand Australian soldiers, plus ammunition, food, and arms, were airlifted from Port Moresby to Wau in late January. The first Australians landed on January 29, 1943 and began fighting as soon as they left the aircraft. According to one report, "many of the Australian troops were wounded so soon following their landing that they were

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<sup>36</sup> Headquarters United States Army, Japan, "18th Army Operations," Japanese Monograph Number 37, 1950, pp. 182-184, reprinted in War in Asia and the Pacific, edited by Donald S. Detwiler and Charles B. Burdick, 15 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980), Vol. 7; Air Evaluation Board, SWPA, "The Battle of the Bismark (sic) Sea and Development of Masthead Attacks," 1 July 1945, pp. 1-7, 27, file 168.7103-37 HRA (hereafter AEB); Kenney, Reports, pp. 176-177; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 63-66.

<sup>37</sup> "18th Army Operations," p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> "The Bismarck Sea Action," pp. 24-25.

evacuated on the same planes that transported them to Wau."<sup>39</sup> Over a three day period, transports airlifted in 244 planeloads carrying over a million pounds of cargo. The reinforcements helped stop the advance, and by the end of January the Japanese had retreated to their positions along the coast near Salamaua and Lae.<sup>40</sup>

The Japanese began planning to send more reinforcements to Lae soon after the January convoy. Generals Imamura Hitoshi, the commander of Eighth Area Army, and Adachi Hatazo, Eighteenth Army commander, decided to transfer the rest of the 51st Division to New Guinea. The new convoy included eight transports carrying over 6000 soldiers, twelve anti-aircraft guns, twenty-one artillery pieces, and fuel and ammunition. The Japanese planners were not unaware of the risks they were taking. They knew that the Allies would meet the move with heavy resistance and they made extensive plans to defend the convoy. The transports were escorted by eight destroyers and had air cover from dawn to dusk. In addition, the experiences of the January convoy to Lae and the attempted advance on Wau had emphasized the need for some protection in the air. As a result, the Japanese planned to attack the airfields at Port Moresby and Milne Bay in order to prevent Allied attacks on the convoy. Even with this protection, Japanese staff officers thought that half of the convoy would be lost before reaching its destination.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Air Transport Operations, Battle of Wau," p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-19. Kenney used a figure of 194 flights, Kenney, Reports, pp. 186-187.

<sup>41</sup> Vice Admiral Mikawa Gunichi, Captain Ohmae Toshikazu, and Rear Admiral Kimura Masafuku, in Special Projects Section, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Advanced Echelon, Headquarters Far East Air Forces, "A Japanese Version of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, 1-4 March 1943," September 1945, pp. 23, 30, 49, reprinted in Detwiler, Vol. 5; "18th Army Operations," pp. 105-106; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 67-68.

Intercepted Japanese radio messages and other intelligence information gave Allied commanders a clear picture of the proposed Japanese plans. A convoy of this size represented a very severe threat to MacArthur's hope of continuing his advance toward the Philippines. With Australian and American ground forces worn out by the fighting near Buna and Gona, the only way to stop the Japanese from consolidating their position in New Guinea was through air power. Realizing the importance of this convoy, Kenney planned to attack it ferociously with everything he had.<sup>42</sup>

Fortunately for the Allies, the Japanese obligingly continued the routine preparations for troop convoys that Kenney's intelligence branch had noted earlier. On February 7, 1943, a Japanese float plane was spotted twenty-five miles east of New Britain and more Japanese aircraft were seen on the airfield at Lae, both signs, according to intelligence officers, warning that "a further attempt to reinforce Lae by sea may be intended."<sup>43</sup> Alerted by these indications, Kenney stepped up the reconnaissance flights over Rabaul and a mission on February 22 hit the jackpot: photos from the mission "showed a record concentration of merchant tonnage" (299,000 tons) in Rabaul Harbor.<sup>44</sup>

On February 25 Kenney received the ULTRA report he was waiting for: an intercepted Japanese radio message indicated a convoy would leave Rabaul for Lae

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<sup>42</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, "Intelligence Summary number 76," p. 1, February 10, 1943, Sutherland Papers NA.

<sup>44</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, "Intelligence Summary number 80," February 23, 1943, p. 1; Sutherland Papers.

between March 5 and 12. He immediately sent word to Whitehead outlining a general plan of action. Kenney recommended a reduction in flying to ensure that the maximum number of aircraft would be available for the mission and suggested sending as many aircraft as possible to the airfield north of the Owen Stanley mountains to prevent weather from interfering with the attack. He also wanted Whitehead to focus reconnaissance near the harbor so that the convoy could be sighted as quickly as possible, since an early sighting would permit multiple attempts at sinking the convoy.<sup>45</sup> After briefing MacArthur on his intentions, Kenney left for Port Moresby for more detailed planning with Whitehead.<sup>46</sup>

Although the airmen had good information on when the convoy would depart (a later message updated the landing date to 5 March, which meant that the convoy would have to depart around the last day of February or the 1st of March) there was still some uncertainty about the route the convoy would take. At Port Moresby, Kenney and Whitehead pored over information gathered by intelligence officers over the past four months about convoy routes and combined that data with weather forecasts for the first week in March. Although the intercepted messages pointed toward the convoy's landing at Lae, Kenney thought it was also possible that the convoy might land further west at Madang or Wewak.<sup>47</sup> Based on weather forecasts

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<sup>45</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 25, 1943, KP.

<sup>46</sup> Kenney diary, February 25, 26, 1943, KP.

<sup>47</sup> Letter Kenney to Whitehead, February 25, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 199-200. Drea suggests that intercepted messages made it clear that Lae was the destination. Kenney viewed the landing site more ambiguously either because he was worried about the accuracy of the data or out of concern that if he was more precise he would divulge the source of the information. Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 69-70. Even on the day of the actual attack an intelligence summary from Kenney's

and Allied efforts at hitting previous convoys, Kenney guessed that the Japanese would sail along the northern coast of New Britain to keep out of range of Allied air attacks for as long as possible, then sail to its destination. To cover all possible contingencies, Whitehead's staff developed three different plans. The worst case was for the convoy to land at Madang. In this scenario only the longer range bombers would be used. If the convoy split up, with some ships sailing for Madang and some for Lae, then targets would be assigned on the basis of aircraft range. The best-case scenario was that the Japanese would land at Lae, which meant the Allies could attack in the Vitiaz Strait, a location that would allow Kenney to use every aircraft at his disposal.<sup>48</sup>

Because the latter case entailed the most complicated air attack, Whitehead and his staff planned out the details of the attack and scheduled a full-scale rehearsal for February 27. This training mission would bring together all of the different aircraft scheduled for the actual attack and allow the flight leaders the chance to straighten out any unforeseen problems. Some of the units involved in the attack had been perfecting their skills in low-level bombing over the past six weeks on a sunken boat near Port Moresby. Although the training resulted in the loss of one aircraft and damage to two others, the use of this realistic target gave the pilots a much better idea of what an

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headquarters stated that the exact destination of the convoy was "uncertain." Allied Air Forces, SWPA, Intelligence Summary Number 82, March 3, 1943, p. 1, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>48</sup> Kenney diary, February 25, 26, 1943, KP; Craven and Cate, 4:141-142.

actual attack would be like.<sup>49</sup> As Kenney waited for the rehearsal, he visited some of the air units near Port Moresby, telling them a little about the plan and stressing the importance of the mission. His meetings with the air and ground crews and observation of the practice attack led Kenney to conclude confidently that "The Japs are going to get the surprise of their lives."<sup>50</sup>

Despite the information of the convoy's departure, actually finding and hitting the convoy turned out to be no easier than previous efforts and involved three days of intense effort.<sup>51</sup> Number 81 convoy, consisting of eight destroyers and eight merchant vessels, was first spotted on the afternoon of March 1. Although B-17s attempted to bomb the convoy at night, the predicted bad weather along the northern coast of New Britain prevented them from finding the ships. The convoy managed to stay below low clouds over the next two days, but Allied aircraft managed to track it and B-17s made several attacks. By the end of March 2, Kenney received reports that his airmen had sunk at least three cargo vessels, badly damaged two more, and set two on fire.<sup>52</sup> While Allied aircraft continued to shadow the convoy, Japanese aircraft were also providing air cover suggesting that their radio transmissions were also being used to track the position of the ships.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> February 27, 1943, KP; Headquarters Advanced Echelon 5AF, "Report on Destruction of Japanese Convoy in Bismark (sic) Sea March 1 to 5, 1943," 6 April 1943, p. 2, Sutherland Papers; McAuly, pp. 21-22.

<sup>50</sup> Kenney diary, February 27, 1943, KP.

<sup>51</sup> Lieutenant General Francis C. Gideon, interview with Mark C. Cleary, July 7, 1982, Larkspur, Colorado, p. 33, file K239.0512-1338 HRA.

<sup>52</sup> March 1, 2, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 202-203.

<sup>53</sup> "Central Bureau Technical Records "

RAAF aircraft continued to harass the convoy throughout the night, and at dawn on March 3, Kenney and Whitehead were advised of the exact location of the enemy. As the attack force rendezvoused over Cape Ward Hunt, they received a radio call from the reconnaissance aircraft tailing the convoy giving the enemy's current position.<sup>54</sup> Just prior to the projected attack, other aircraft bombed the Japanese airfield at Lae to reduce interference from enemy fighters.<sup>55</sup> Just before 1000 on March 3, the concentrated attacks began. B-17s bombing from 8,000 feet were in the lead, escorted by the P-38s. They were followed by two groups of B-25s flying at 5,000 feet. Immediately behind these aircraft came the low altitude attackers: 13 RAAF Beaufighters, 12 of Kenney's newly modified B-25 "commerce destroyers," and 12 A-20s.<sup>56</sup>

As they spotted the convoy, the aircraft formations split to attack individual ships. A violent, swirling melee ensued. Pilots dodged anti-aircraft fire from the ships and wildly twisted to keep from hitting other aircraft, as the ships captains maneuvered their vessels to avoid the attacks. As violent as the attack was, it was over in a few moments. The scene from the sea was horrific. The merchant vessels were engulfed in flames and, one sailor recalled, "whole ships blew up."<sup>57</sup> Kenney's

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<sup>54</sup> Robert W. Reed, 19th Bombardment Squadron, "Tactical Study of Attack on Convoy near Lae, New Guinea," March 1943, in Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>55</sup> AEB, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Fifth Bomber Command Orders for Major Assault on Convoy, 0955, 3 March 1943, found in AEB, p. 61; Kenney diary, March 3, 1943. KP

<sup>57</sup> Masuda Reiji quoted in Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, Japan at War: An Oral History (New York: The New Press, 1992), p. 301.



airmen departed the scene leaving all of the transports on fire and sinking, and three of the escorting destroyers sinking or badly damaged.<sup>58</sup> A second attack in the afternoon followed, and finished off the stranded vessels.<sup>59</sup> Airmen returned to the area for the next several days for what Kenney euphemistically termed "mopping up" operations.<sup>60</sup>

In reality, the "mopping up" meant strafing the life boats and rafts carrying the Japanese soldiers. Airmen justified their actions in two ways. Many considered it retribution for past, and perhaps future, Japanese atrocities. The day before the mass attack, on March 2, the crew members who parachuted from a B-17 were shot as they floated down. Four B-17s were attempting to strike the convoy when the formation was attacked by fifteen Japanese fighters. A fire started in the wing of one B-17 and the aircraft pulled out of formation. Shortly afterwards, seven men were seen bailing out of the aircraft. One airman fell out of his parachute harness to his death, but the others "were followed down by enemy fighters, that strafed them as they fell."<sup>61</sup> Kenney's chief of staff, Donald Wilson, maintained that the Japanese shooting of the men in their parachutes "set the pace for the 'no-quarter' procedures from then on."<sup>62</sup> James Murphy, who flew during these attacks on the soldiers in the water, was

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<sup>58</sup> McAulay, Bismarck Sea, p. 101.

<sup>59</sup> AEB, pp. 20-22.

<sup>60</sup> Kenney diary, March 4, 5, 1943, KP.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, Intelligence Officer, 63rd Bombardment Squadron, to Commanding Officer, 43rd Bombardment Group, Subject: Narrative Report of Attacks on "Lae Convoy" March 2-3, 1943, March 12, 1943, Sutherland Papers, Box 64. Kenney says that this attack occurred on March 3, Kenney, Reports, p. 204, a claim that is often repeated, see McAulay, Bismarck Sea, pp. 102-103, 115; James T. Murphy with A. B. Feuer, Skip Bombing (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993), p. 119.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, p. 269.

incensed by the Japanese actions. "I wanted to vent some of my anger," Murphy later recalled, "and kill every Japanese son of a bitch I could find."<sup>63</sup> He felt that his actions were acceptable because they would be blessed by the men who had been killed. "Somehow all of us knew that the crew [of the B-17] would be smiling at us for the things that we did."<sup>64</sup>

While some airmen were motivated by revenge, others felt that military necessity dictated the killing of the Japanese soldiers.<sup>65</sup> According to this line of reasoning, it was necessary to exterminate the Japanese in order to end the war. Kenney himself clearly believed this; "The Jap asks no quarter and expects none. His psychology is win or perish and I believe that it is the national psychology."<sup>66</sup> He labeled the Japanese "Tough fanatics with a queer psychology incomprehensible to us."<sup>67</sup> While some flyers found the strafing mission "distasteful" and some even became sick, there is no indication that the flyers believed that what they were doing was unlawful or immoral.<sup>68</sup> One officer summed up the attitude of many of the

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<sup>63</sup> Murphy, p. 119.

<sup>64</sup> Murphy, p. 120.

<sup>65</sup> Morison, 4: 62. Historian John Dower disagrees with this assessment and views the actions as part of a cycle of atrocities, John Dower, War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, January 1, 1943, KP.

<sup>67</sup> Kenney diary, December 12, 1942, also entries for December 29, 31, 1942, KP.

<sup>68</sup> Distasteful comment found in Number 30 Squadron RAAF, "Attack on Convoy off Lae, 5/3/43" in Sutherland Papers, Box 64, NA and Wilson, p. 269. The statement about flyers becoming sick is from Major Edward F. Hoover, 5th Bomber Command, quoted in Vern Haugland, The AAF Against Japan (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948), p. 163, also cited in Dower, p. 67.

participants when he said, "The enemy is out to kill you and you are out to kill the enemy. You can't be sporting in a war."<sup>69</sup>

Kenney himself was not bothered by the actions and was exuberant about the results of the mission, claiming the destruction of between eleven and fourteen cargo vessels and sixty aircraft, as well as 15,000 soldiers. By comparison, Kenney's air units suffered only 25 casualties and lost only six aircraft.<sup>70</sup> MacArthur was likewise excited and his headquarters released a report trumpeting the results of the battle. The communiqué claimed that the Japanese lost twenty-two ships, over one hundred aircraft, and 15,000 men.<sup>71</sup> In reality, the numbers were much less. While the Japanese did lose all eight of the merchant vessels in the convoy, only four of the escorting destroyers were sunk. In all over 3,000 Japanese soldiers lost their lives in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.<sup>72</sup> The Japanese also lost about two-thirds of the aircraft at Rabaul that had been sent out to protect the convoy. One Japanese Army Air Force squadron lost or damaged so many aircraft that it had to return Japan.<sup>73</sup>

There were several factors that contributed to the overwhelming success of the convoy attack. Certainly the experience to that point in the war was a factor. In particular, the unsuccessful attack on the convoy to Lae in January had emphasized the

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<sup>69</sup> Major Edward F. Hoover, 5th Bomber Command, quoted in Haugland, p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> Kenney diary, March 5, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup> Letter, Wilson to Whitehead, March 5, 1943, KP; James, 2:295-296.

<sup>72</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, n.d.), 1:498; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 71.

<sup>73</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 12, 14.

need to conduct concentrated attacks in order to overcome the convoy's air defenses. Group Captain William H. (Bull) Garing, an RAAF pilot who had flown maritime operations for a number of years, convinced Kenney and Whitehead about the need for mass attacks and the planning for the Bismarck Sea Battle was done with this aim in mind.<sup>74</sup> Although the Japanese tried to protect the convoy with air cover, they were hampered by their inability to build forward airfields on which they could base their aircraft and overwhelmed by the number of attackers.<sup>75</sup>

Changes in tactics and armament also played a role. The low-level tactics and forward-firing guns on the modified B-25s surprised the Japanese. They were not expecting low-altitude attacks and, consequently, had kept their protective fighter cover at a higher altitude. The arrival of the first attackers and their fighter escort occupied the Japanese fighter cover and caused the convoy to disperse to avoid the bombs from above. These evasive maneuvers made it impossible for the ships to protect each other with their antiaircraft fire and made the low-level attacks that followed easier. The low altitude attacks were made possible by changes made to bombing fuzes. The firing pin of the fuze was modified so that it would not bend when the bomb hit the water, thus permitting the bomb to skip toward the ship, and the new fuzes were rushed to the airfields just prior to the attack.<sup>76</sup> Kenney's and

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<sup>74</sup> Headquarters Advanced Echelon 5AF, p. 2; AEB, pp. 1, 18; Alan Stephens, "Australia's Forgotten Victory: The Battle of the Bismarck Sea," in The RAAF in the Southwest Pacific Area 1942-1945, pp. 110-111.

<sup>75</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:197-199.

<sup>76</sup> AEB, p. 49; Letter, Wilson to Whitehead, March 5, 1943, KP.

Whitehead's persistence at training for the new types of attacks also paid off. The six weeks of practice bombing on the wrecked ship off Port Moresby increased the pilot's ability to judge the range accurately when attacking the vessels on the morning of March 3.<sup>77</sup>

The contribution of intelligence to this engagement was crucial and cannot be overestimated. The painstaking work of tracking and analyzing past convoys provided Kenney with an accurate forecast that a convoy was imminent and its probable sailing routes. ULTRA information was invaluable for pinpointing when the convoy would move which allowed Kenney to commit his forces when they would have the greatest impact. Without this information Kenney would have had to expend much more effort at simply trying to locate important targets. The time and resources spent on these missions would not have been available for subsequent attacks. Kenney would have had been like a boxer swinging in the dark; if he landed a punch it would hurt, but striking a blow was difficult. With accurate and dependable intelligence the Japanese moves were largely transparent to Kenney, while the enemy had almost no knowledge of his plans. To Kenney's credit, he was willing and able to integrate the information into operations on very short notice.

Although Kenney tended to downplay the important role that intelligence played in his success, he saw the entire action as vindication of his efforts since arriving in the theater. "The Battle of the Bismarck Sea was not something that just happened," he later said. "We didn't just see the convoy coming and go out and hit it.

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<sup>77</sup> AEB, p. 9.

It was planned and rehearsed. We prepared. We even picked the spot for the engagement."<sup>78</sup> Kenney was right. The results of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea represented decisions made many months before, weeks of training and work, all capped off by thorough planning and brave execution. Certainly Japanese errors and some luck were involved in the battle, but it was luck that rested on excellent preparation and sound tactics.<sup>79</sup>

Kenney was justifiably proud of the accomplishments of his air forces, and the battle garnered great public attention. The battle made the front page of the New York Times on March 4, 1943, and the bold headline screamed "M'ARTHUR FLIERS DESTROY 22 JAPANESE SHIPS; ENEMY LOSES 15,000 MEN IN CONVOY; 55 PLANES."<sup>80</sup> The newspaper called it "one of the greatest triumphs of the war."<sup>81</sup> The battle continued to bring public attention to the Southwest Pacific as over the next few days the Times ran articles detailing various aspects of the engagement, as did Newsweek and Time.<sup>82</sup>

The Battle of the Bismarck Sea was noteworthy for several reasons. First, there were few air battles during World War II that occurred over the space of just a few days. While the results of most bombing missions could be tallied in terms of the

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<sup>78</sup> Kenney, "Air Power," p. 60.

<sup>79</sup> Morison, 6:63, attributes Kenney's success in the battle to a "fair measure of good luck."

<sup>80</sup> New York Times, March 4, 1943, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> New York Times, March 5, 6, 7, 1943; "Right Guess and Great Tactics Won Us Bismarck Sea Victory," Newsweek, March 15, 1943, pp. 17-18; "Battle of the Pacific," Time, March 15, 1945, p. 20.

bomb tonnage dropped or number of aircraft destroyed, it was difficult to assess how one particular mission related to a larger campaign or to ending the war. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea, on the other hand, had more of the attributes of a naval or ground battle. It was tightly bounded in time and space, two factors that made the results easy for the average citizen to comprehend. In addition, the battle occurred at a time when there was little competition for news. The fighting in New Guinea and Guadalcanal was over, and the conquest of North Africa had stalled. This was one of the few American exploits to write about. MacArthur's drive for recognition and headlines was also an important factor. Since the battle occurred at a time when military planners were making strategic decisions about the future conduct of the war, MacArthur probably hoped the success in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea would attract attention and support from Washington.

Despite the success achieved by Kenney's airmen, the claims made about the losses in the battle proved to be the most long-running and controversial part of the engagement. Kenney and MacArthur probably knew by the end of March that the reports they had first submitted on the convoy, and went into the New York Times headlines, were exaggerated. Documents and diaries recovered from the wreckage on March 8, revealed the number of troops and the loading schedules, as well as the sailing formation of the convoy.<sup>83</sup> A study done by the intelligence division of the Air Staff in the summer of 1943 confirmed the information recovered on the number of

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<sup>83</sup> Allied Translation and Interpreter Service, Southwest Pacific Area, "Bismarck Sea Operation February-March 1943 Part Two," April 8, 1943, file 710.625-12 HRA, part one of the report was published on March 29, 1943; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 71-72.

ships sunk and Washington all but directed Kenney to issue a corrected version of the battle.<sup>84</sup> The chief of air intelligence told Kenney that the "results announced in the original communiqué must undergo a downward revision."<sup>85</sup> MacArthur, responding to the tone as well as the actual information in the request, refused to issue any new messages. He claimed that the intelligence analysis was faulty and even threatened "action against those responsible" for questioning his reports.<sup>86</sup>

Kenney also responded vigorously in a letter to General Arnold in which Kenney laid out his reasons for not changing his report. Kenney suggested that there were actually two different convoys that joined together just prior to the attack on March 3. Washington's analysis was faulty, he reasoned, because it dealt with only a part of the force that was destroyed. Kenney also argued that there was no "particular value" to the public in releasing information about an event that had happened many months before.<sup>87</sup> Kenney was also shrewd enough to realize that the numbers only told part of the story. "Had there been many more ships sunk, the immediate value of this operation could not have been greater," he maintained.<sup>88</sup> The battle has "caused a

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<sup>84</sup> Memorandum Brigadier General Edgar P. Sorenson, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence to Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, Subject: Proposed Release of Revised Information re Bismarck Sea Action, August 12, 1943, file 142.16-15 HRA; Messages, Marshall to MacArthur September 7, 8, 1943, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum, Sorenson to Kenney.

<sup>86</sup> Message MacArthur to Marshall, September 7, 1943, RG 4 MMMA.

<sup>87</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, Subject: Proposed Release of Revised Information re: Bismarck Sea Action, September 14, 1943, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.



total disruption of Japanese plans and placed a burden on his system of supply and transportation that will continue to rest on him for some time to come."<sup>89</sup>

While Kenney's assessment accurately portrayed the effects of this air-sea battle on Japanese operations, the precise numbers continued to nag him. After the surrender of Japan in September 1945, he appointed a board of officers who had not been involved in the action to prepare a report on the action using Japanese sources. While Kenney claimed that the Japanese officers he talked to after the war told him their losses in the battle were even greater than he had claimed, the investigating board came to a different conclusion.<sup>90</sup> The officers interviewed a number of Japanese officials about the convoy and the impact that battle had on future plans in New Guinea. Their report confirmed the assessment of the intelligence survey completed in the summer of 1943, which judged that the convoy contained eight merchant vessels, all of which were sunk, and eight destroyers, of which four were destroyed. The investigating officers also concluded that the Japanese lost approximately 2,900 men, not the 15,000 mentioned in MacArthur's dispatch.<sup>91</sup> Although aware of this contrary evidence Kenney was apparently unswayed. He stuck to his original version of events

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Kenney interview with James, pp. 22-23.

<sup>91</sup> "A Japanese Version of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea." The evidence produced by this investigation was thought to have been so damaging and so contrary to Kenney's and MacArthur's findings that the report was destroyed. See, "Report on the Battle of the Bismarck Sea," file 142.15-16 HRA, Craven and Cate, 4:717, fn. 49, and James, 2:300 for comments asserting this claim. The authors listed in the "Japanese Version of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea" and the chronology of this investigation reflect the information previously thought to have been destroyed.

and in his account of the war published in 1949, he used the figures that had first been reported, never commenting on the ensuing controversy.<sup>92</sup>

One historian argues that the exaggerated reports on the Battle of the Bismarck Sea were "symptomatic of the publicity policy at GHQ."<sup>93</sup> The policy was based on boosting MacArthur's prowess, and distrusting anyone, especially in Washington, who might criticize his actions.<sup>94</sup> MacArthur's biographer adds that MacArthur's reaction to the proposed revisions to the battle accounts was consistent with his reaction to other actions that he believed threatened his image or honor--MacArthur simply refused to back down.<sup>95</sup> Kenney, although not as driven by the idea of personal honor as MacArthur, was also sensitive to his image and tended to react critically to reports that questioned his claims. Several months prior, Kenney had been questioned about the claims of enemy losses. He cabled Arnold, "I do not appreciate the implication of exaggeration or falsification by myself and members of my command and regard the questioning of the accuracy of an official report as a serious matter . . . . I can only speculate as to the motives involved."<sup>96</sup> Kenney's refusal to change his stance was probably linked to his relationship with MacArthur. MacArthur had stressed the requirement for loyalty from his officers in their first meeting, and since that time

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<sup>92</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 205-206.

<sup>93</sup> Gavin Long, MacArthur as Military Commander (New York: Van Norstrand Reinhold Company, 1969), p. 118.

<sup>94</sup> Long, pp. 118, 136.

<sup>95</sup> James, 2:303.

<sup>96</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, December 26, 1942, RG 4, MMMA.

Kenney had drawn closer personally and professionally with his commander. Kenney probably saw little point in crossing MacArthur over this issue. In addition, the public recognition Kenney gained for the episode--among other things, he was put on the cover of Life magazine in March 1943--would have made any retraction quite embarrassing.<sup>97</sup>

In his role as commander Kenney was also sensitive to the morale of the men in his command and was cautious about revising the claims for this reason. Although damage reports were useful to commanders in assessing the effectiveness of their attacks, the information was also used for providing a sense of accomplishment to the men in the units. Part of the reason Kenney trumpeted the claims from the first mass raid on Rabaul to the extent that he did was to boost morale. After the first P-38 engagements Kenney apparently "allowed a large number of claims to be confirmed for the sake of [morale] over statistical accuracy."<sup>98</sup> Since Kenney could rely on ULTRA information for an accurate assessment of the enemy's capabilities, he might have seen little harm in being generous with the claims of his crews and may have viewed any reduction in their claims as harmful to morale.

The focus on the number of ships sunk, by both Kenney and others, obscured the real effects of this battle, for the impact on Japanese operations was much greater than the figures alone suggested. Although the number of soldiers lost was less than the number claimed, only about 800 ever made it to Lae; the rest were returned to

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<sup>97</sup> Life, March 22, 1943. The caption on the cover read "Victor of the Bismarck Sea."

<sup>98</sup> John Stanaway, Possum, Clover & Hades: The 475th Fighter Group in World War II (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Military/Aviation History, 1993), p. 14.

Rabaul. Those that did survive the sinking lost all of their equipment, including their small arms.<sup>99</sup> Also lost in the attack were four months of supplies and enough ammunition for a division-sized battle.<sup>100</sup> The events of March 3 sent a shock wave through the Japanese military. Japanese military leaders realized that they could not afford repeated losses on the scale they had suffered in this operation. As a result, the Lae Transport Operation, as it was called by the Japanese, was the last Japanese attempt to send large numbers of reinforcements or supplies to Lae. Without reinforcements the soldiers already in the area were critically weakened. The commander of the Japanese Eight Fleet at Rabaul, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, maintained that the destruction of the convoy "opened the way" for the advance to the Philippines and "dealt a fatal blow to the South Pacific operations,"<sup>101</sup> an assessment echoed by other Japanese naval officers.<sup>102</sup> The Japanese continued to try to send some troops to Lae, but they now had to land further west, at Madang and Wewak, and then trek through the jungle, subject to air attacks, heat, and disease, before getting to the combat area. Although the Japanese continued to bring supplies into western New Guinea, it was difficult to move them forward to the combat forces. Barges and submarines could be used to move troops and supplies, but both of these

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<sup>99</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:204.

<sup>100</sup> "18th Army Operations," p. 184.

<sup>101</sup> "Reply to written questions by Vice Admiral Gunicki Mikawa, in "A Japanese Version of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea," p. 25. Also Reports of MacArthur 2:205; "18th Army Operations," pp. 189-191.

<sup>102</sup> Commander Yasumi Doi, Staff Officer, Southeast Area Fleet, November 20, 1945, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:398.

methods had disadvantages. The barges were not made for long distance operations and broke down frequently. In addition, the boats proved easy targets for the American torpedo patrol (PT) boats that prowled the coasts at night. The submarines could not carry large amounts and when used as transports could not also be sent out to attack Allied ships. The destruction of the convoy also stopped Japanese plans to build up their air strength in New Guinea. The convoy contained the aviation fuel and spare parts needed at the airfields. The destruction of the convoy effectively halted efforts to gain control of the air in New Guinea.<sup>103</sup> In short, Kenney's assessment that "had there been many more ships sunk, the immediate value of this operation could not have been greater," stands as the best testimony to the value of this operation to the outcome of the war in the Southwest Pacific.<sup>104</sup>

### **Pacific Military Conference**

On the day after the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, Kenney departed Australia for Washington, D.C. to take part in discussions over the course of the war in the Pacific. Although the decisions made at the Casablanca Conference in January provided the general outline for operations during 1943, few details had been established. The goal in the south Pacific was to continue operations aimed at keeping pressure on the Japanese, but the means to accomplish this end had not been spelled out.<sup>105</sup> In order to

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<sup>103</sup> "A Japanese Version of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea," pp. 4, 23-25; "18th Army Operations," pp. 179-182; Kenney interview with Stanley, p. 35; James, *Years*, 2:296; Craven and Cate, 4:146-147; Miller, p. 41; Drea, *MacArthur's ULTRA*, p. 71.

<sup>104</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, September 14, 1943.

<sup>105</sup> Morton, p. 385; Miller, pp. 6-8.

fix the military operations that would be undertaken in the Pacific, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a planning conference in Washington, D.C, known as the Pacific Military Conference, in March 1943. The meetings included members of MacArthur's command, Admiral Halsey's adjoining South Pacific command, officers from Admiral Nimitz's headquarters in Hawaii, and planners in Washington.<sup>106</sup> Kenney attended the meeting along with MacArthur's chief of staff Richard Sutherland and the chief operations and planning officer in MacArthur's headquarters, Stephen Chamberlin.<sup>107</sup> Although Sutherland would present the plans to the conference, MacArthur asked Kenney to go so that he could plead for more aircraft to support MacArthur's plans for the next year. He also hoped that Kenney could keep Sutherland "out of trouble."<sup>108</sup>

One of the objectives of the Pacific Military Conference was to coordinate MacArthur's plans with Admiral Halsey's efforts in the south Pacific. Properly coordinated, the two advances would form a pincer movement that would squeeze off and destroy the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul.<sup>109</sup> Sutherland's presentation of MacArthur's plan ran into immediate difficulty because the forces necessary for the task exceeded the number that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had planned on sending.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Miller, pp. 11-12; Matloff, pp. 91-92.

<sup>107</sup> Kenney, Reports p. 198; Miller, p. 12, fn. 12.

<sup>108</sup> Kenney diary, February 28, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 201.

<sup>109</sup> Miller, pp. 11-12.

<sup>110</sup> Morton, pp. 390-391, Miller, pp. 12-14.

Kenney had told MacArthur that he needed thirty groups, which amounted to 1,964 aircraft, but the present plans allocated only half as many, 18 groups of approximately 942 planes. Both Kenney and Sutherland were dejected over the differences.<sup>111</sup> Either the objective for the year would have to be changed or the number of forces increased. In the end, the theater planners and the Joint Chiefs of Staff compromised, increasing the number of forces scheduled for the Pacific slightly while trimming the goals of the operations. There would be no direct invasion of Rabaul in 1943. In preparation for such a move, the final directive issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the end of March ordered MacArthur to eliminate the Japanese presence in New Guinea as far west as Madang and to establish Allied control over the western part of New Britain. In the South Pacific theater, forces under the command of Admiral Halsey would advance to the southeastern part of the island of Bougainville. This would put the two commands in a position to attack Rabaul directly if ordered. Although Halsey commanded the forces in his theater, MacArthur retained the strategic direction for coordinating the timing of the attacks.<sup>112</sup>

While in Washington, Kenney pressed Arnold and his staff for more aircraft. He was assured that he was getting as many as were available. The news from the Battle of the Bismarck Sea was just being published during Kenney's visit and resulted in his invitation to the White House for a meeting with President Roosevelt about the war in the Southwest Pacific and, in particular, the recent destruction of the Japanese

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<sup>111</sup> Hayes, pp. 312-315.

<sup>112</sup> Morton, p. 398-399; Miller, pp. 16-19.

convoy. During their hour-long meeting, Kenney seized the opportunity to plead his case for more aircraft before a higher authority, a plea that he believed was instrumental in getting more aircraft than the Joint Chiefs of Staff had originally intended to provide to the Southwest Pacific.<sup>113</sup> The visit with the President may have been another reason Kenney was unwilling to modify the figures on the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. His success had not only brought him attention in the press, during his visit to Washington he was put on the cover of Life magazine, but had also gained him access to the White House.<sup>114</sup> Changing the figures would have tarnished this distinction, an event he wished to avoid.

In another unusual meeting, Kenney, Sutherland, and their wives met with Representative Henry Luce and his wife, correspondent Clare Booth Luce, whom Kenney had met in Paris in 1940, for lunch at their apartment. After lunch, Senator Arthur Vandenberg arrived to sound out the two men about recruiting MacArthur for the Republican nomination for President in 1944. Kenney told Vandenberg that he did not want MacArthur to run for election and believed that MacArthur did not want anything to do with politics.<sup>115</sup> Whether Kenney actually advised MacArthur not to

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<sup>113</sup> Kenney diary March 17, 25, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 215-217. Kenney's meeting with Roosevelt took place on March 17 and Kenney returned to the White House on March 25 for the presentation of the Medal of Honor to Kenneth Walker's family. In a memo written to the President between the two meetings, General Marshall praised Kenney's exploits, Memorandum, Marshall to Roosevelt, March 22, 1943, cited in Perret, p. 530, fn. 14. In addition, Kenney noted that Arnold was called to the White House for a meeting on March 21, 1943. Kenney diary, March 21, 22, 1943, KP.

<sup>114</sup> Life, March 22, 1943. The cover read "Victor of Bismarck Sea."

<sup>115</sup> Kenney diary, March 14, 1943, KP; Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr., The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg, with the collaboration of Joe Alex Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), pp. 77-78.



run is uncertain, but if he did, his advice went unheeded. The "MacArthur Adventure," as Senator Vandenberg later termed it, began in April 1943, shortly after Sutherland and Kenney returned to the Southwest Pacific, when MacArthur wrote Vandenberg that he would not resist efforts aimed at gaining him the Republican nomination. Vandenberg hoped that the convention would deadlock between two other candidates and MacArthur would emerge as the consensus choice of the convention. MacArthur never won enough votes to be a serious contender for the nomination, however, and in the spring of 1944 requested that efforts made on his behalf in the Republican primaries be stopped.<sup>116</sup> What role or counsel Kenney offered during this period is unclear. Others on MacArthur's staff, especially Sutherland and MacArthur's intelligence officer, Major General Charles Willoughby, were very heavily involved. Certainly Kenney was aware of the on-going efforts, and probably was not adverse to the idea that his commander might be president, but left no trace of his thoughts. This might also explain MacArthur and Kenney's refusal to correct the loss figures from the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. An updated version of the story, released in the summer of 1943, would have diminished one of MacArthur's most decisive victories to date and might have undermined his support in the nomination process.

Despite this excursion into electoral politics, Kenney stuck to the task of pleading for more people, planes, and equipment at the strategy meetings. He

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<sup>116</sup> Philip J. Briggs, "General MacArthur and the Presidential Election of 1944," Presidential Studies Quarterly 22 (Winter 1992): 33-40; Vandenberg, pp. 75-89; James, 2: 403-440.

emphasized his need for more aircraft, more mechanics, and more officers to man the needed headquarters for controlling operations. Kenney remained concerned about the number of engineering units allocated to the Southwest Pacific. Perhaps drawing on his own background of the problems in construction, he argued that Washington did not appreciate the need for all types of engineering units to build airfields and other facilities, and the difficulties of carrying out combat operations in areas that had no modern infrastructure.<sup>117</sup> He told Arnold, "in this type of warfare you need air force, engineers and infantry in about the same strength."<sup>118</sup>

The decisions made at the Pacific Military Conference outlined the general plans for the "Cartwheel" offensive in the south Pacific for 1943. When Kenney returned to Australia in late March he began the detailed planning to support both MacArthur's ground offensive in New Guinea and Halsey's efforts in the Solomons.

### **The Japanese strike back**

The loss of the convoy in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea had made it clear to Japanese commanders that any hope they had of defending their positions in New Guinea and the Solomons had to be preceded by an effort to reduce the strength of the Allied air units. In April 1943, Admiral Yamamoto, the Combined Fleet Commander, assumed command of air units at Rabaul and implemented plans to eliminate Allied air power. To support the operation, codenamed Operation I, aircraft were flown from

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<sup>117</sup> Letter, Kenney to William Ritchie, G-3, War Department, April 14, 1943, KP.

<sup>118</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 10, 1942, p. 3.

Truk to Rabaul. Yamamoto planned to strike airfields in the Solomons from April 5 to 10, and then turn his attention on New Guinea. On April 11, 22 Japanese bombers, escorted by 72 fighters, attacked Allied shipping in a harbor on the northern coast of New Guinea. The next day Port Moresby was hit by 130 Japanese fighters and 43 bombers.<sup>119</sup> Buoyed by the exaggerated claims of his pilots that they had demolished two destroyers, 25 transports, and 175 planes, Yamamoto halted the raids on 16 April. In reality, the Japanese had only sunk one destroyer, a tanker, and about twenty-five planes.<sup>120</sup> Yamamoto made plans to tour the area and visit the victorious pilots at their air bases. Allied cryptographers, however, broke the Japanese codes and knew his itinerary exactly. On April 18, as his aircraft approached Buin, eighteen P-38s from Admiral Halsey's command arrived. Yamamoto's aircraft was shot down and crashed in the jungle, killing the man who had masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbor and perhaps the best strategist the Japanese possessed.<sup>121</sup>

During the build-up of Japanese air strength at Rabaul, Kenney was in Port Moresby directing daily combat operations while Whitehead, who had been at the advanced headquarters almost continuously since the previous August, enjoyed a well-deserved break in Australia. Intercepted messages and photo reconnaissance missions both showed that the Japanese were sending large numbers of aircraft into the airfields at Rabaul, and intelligence officers predicted that the Japanese would soon begin large

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<sup>119</sup> Morton, 411-415; Miller, 42-44; Morison, 6:117-127; Gillison, p. 700.

<sup>120</sup> Morison, 6:127.

<sup>121</sup> Morison, 6:128-129; Craven and Cate, 4:231-214.

scale air attacks against New Guinea.<sup>122</sup> Although forewarned about the attacks, Kenney was surprised by the Japanese choice of targets on their first attack. He anticipated that their targets would be the shipping at Milne Bay, rather than the airfields at Port Moresby, and, when given warning of the air attack, Kenney sent the fighters east to protect Milne Bay. When the Japanese attackers continued on to Port Moresby, Kenney's fighters were out of position. Nonetheless, damage was light and Kenney freely admitted, "I got badly fooled and was lucky to get out of it as well as I did."<sup>123</sup> The next day Kenney had better luck. The RAAF Wireless Section at Port Moresby provided two and hours advance notice of the Japanese raid and before the Japanese hit the northern coast of New Guinea one-third of the attacking force was destroyed.<sup>124</sup>

Though well-planned and executed, Yamamoto's air offensive confirmed Kenney's low opinion of the Japanese and their use of air power.<sup>125</sup> Their air commanders were "a disgrace to the airman's profession."<sup>126</sup> and were unable to "understand air warfare."<sup>127</sup> They could not handle large numbers of aircraft, and "made piecemeal attacks and didn't follow them up."<sup>128</sup> Kenney's assessment was

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<sup>122</sup> Allied Air Forces, SWPA, Intelligence Summary, Number 89, March 27, 1943, Number 90, March 30, 1943, Number 92, April 7, 1943, in Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>123</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 228-229.

<sup>124</sup> Bleakley, pp. 81-82.

<sup>125</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 234.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Kenney reiterates this point in Kenney diary, June 30, 1943, KP.

certainly colored by his racial attitudes, for the Japanese formations had been just as large a number of aircraft as Kenney had available. Yet in one area Kenney's analysis was correct. Yamamoto's efforts showed that the Japanese airmen were either unwilling or unable to persist in their attacks and they had little impact on Kenney's attempt to gain control of the air.

### **Organizing for Combat**

Kenney's innovative solutions to problems were not limited to technical and tactical matters. The air task force was an example of an organizational innovation in response to the unique environmental and tactical situation that he faced in the Southwest Pacific. The First Air Task Force was activated at a forward airfield across the Owen Stanley mountains from Port Moresby called Dobodura under the command of Colonel Frederick "Freddy" Smith on March 4, 1943.<sup>129</sup> As Kenney noted at the end of the Papuan campaign, the pace and pattern of operations in the Southwest Pacific would be closely tied to the range of the aircraft in the theater. Ground forces could not advance into an area until the Allies had gained control of the air and isolated the area. Ground troops would then invade and secure an airfield to support the next advance. Since the distance, environment, and equipment of the Southwest Pacific made it impossible for commanders to communicate dependably with the units

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<sup>129</sup> Kenney diary, March 4, 1943, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 5, 1943, KP. The organization was initially named the Buna Air Task Force.

at the forward airfields, the commander of an air task force, such as Smith had "complete authority to handle any situation."<sup>130</sup>

In essence, the air task force was a miniature version of Whitehead's headquarters: an advanced headquarters that was flexible in size and assigned aircraft for a specific task. The air task force commander handled the problems at the forward field and provided liaison with the ground forces, but had a minimum of administrative responsibilities.<sup>131</sup> Although Kenney liked the organization, air task forces were never officially condoned in Washington. Without official standing it was difficult to get qualified officers to fill the positions in the organizations. Smith, for example, was officially the chief of staff for Fifth Air Force at the same time that he was the commander of the First Air Task Force. Kenney had broached the issue with Arnold during his visit to the Southwest Pacific in the fall of 1942 and continued to press the issue when he returned to Washington in March of 1943.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the shortage of officers, Kenney continued to use the air task force because it offered several advantages. The most obvious benefit for the crews flying the missions was the ability to plan missions together. Having the headquarters of the First Air Task Force at Dobodura put it close to the flying units using the airfields in

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<sup>130</sup> Kenney diary, March 5, 1943; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 5, 1943, KP; Wilson interview with Moore, p. 3; St. Clair Street interview with Beverly Moore, September 19, 1945, pp. 2-3, file 706.201 HRA.

<sup>131</sup> Colonel H. P. Dexter, "Report on Air Support in Southwest Pacific Area During the Period November 1, 1943 to February 1, 1943," April 10, 1944, p. 7-10, file 706.4501 HRA; Advanced Headquarters, Allied Land Forces, SWPA, "Army-Air Cooperation in New Guinea," August 1944, KP; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, pp. 8-11, 89-90.

<sup>132</sup> "Notes to discuss with General Arnold," September 24, 1942; Kenney to Colonel William L. Ritchie, Operations Division, War Department, April 14, 1943, pp. 3-4, KP.

the same area. Since the Air Task Force controlled different kinds of aircraft, planning for missions that used mixed aircraft types, for example fighter with bombers, was relatively easy. Instead of trying to send messages to different units, the group operations and intelligence officers met at the headquarters and worked out the details for a mission and then returned to tell their own flyers about the plan.<sup>133</sup> The commander of First Air Task Force also worked out the details of operations with the Royal Australian Air Force in New Guinea through conversations with their equivalent to the air task force, Number 9 Group.<sup>134</sup>

From Kenney's perspective the air task force also gave him a mechanism for centralizing control over aircraft in the theater and providing for flexible employment. Although Kenney was designated the Allied Air Forces Commander, the current procedures for the air support for ground operations, codified in Field Manual 31-35 Aviation in Support of Ground Forces and based largely on maneuvers held in the Carolinas and Louisiana in 1941, stated that air support would be provided by an Air Support Command that functioned under the orders of the theater commander, not the air commander. In addition, the aircraft in the Air Support Command would be

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<sup>133</sup> Jarred V. Crabb, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Julian and Major Goldstein, April 17, 28, 1970, USAF Academy, Colorado, pp. 120-122, file K239.0512-622 HRA; Ronald Yoshino, Lightning Strikes: The 475th Fighter Group in the Pacific War, 1943-1945 (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1988), pp. 32-34; Robert R. Herring, ed., History of the 308th Bombardment Wing (San Angelo, Texas: Newsfoto Publishing, Co., 1945), file 168.7103-42 HRA; Herbert O. Johansen, "Our Air Task Force," Air Force, 27 (December 1944): 7, 40.

<sup>134</sup> Hewitt, p. 96.

allocated to corps or division commanders and they would establish the target priorities.<sup>135</sup>

Kenney viewed the idea of an Air Support Command, and the concomitant dispersion of aircraft, as foolish and dangerous. He stated flatly: "the basic idea is wrong."<sup>136</sup> Kenney rejected a suggestion by one of his staff officers about forming an air support command, telling Whitehead that "supporting ground troops with an air effort is just another air operation" and that he saw no need for a separate organization.<sup>137</sup> Because of the shortage of aircraft in Kenney's command, he reasoned that the dispersion to individual corps commanders would waste valuable and scarce resources. The air needs of each individual ground unit varied greatly in relation to whether they were actively engaged in an operation, whereas air operations were continuous.<sup>138</sup> Centralizing control of the aircraft allowed them to be used more effectively. In addition, Kenney's centralized control was more flexible because aircraft could be sent against different targets depending on the current circumstances.<sup>139</sup> Whitehead agreed with Kenney's reasoning, telling him "there is no tactical reason for such a command."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> War Department Field Manual 31-35, Aviation in Support of Ground Forces, April 9, 1942, file 170-121031-35 HRA; Futrell, pp. 133-134, 136.

<sup>136</sup> Kenney diary, January 11, 1943, KP.

<sup>137</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 14, 1943, Whitehead Papers; Baker, pp. 70-71.

<sup>138</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 14, 1943.

<sup>139</sup> Kenney diary, January 11, 1943, KP.

<sup>140</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, February 16, 1943, Whitehead Papers.



The idea of an air support command was squashed permanently when Kenney issued standard operating procedures for the Allied Air Forces flying in support of ground forces. In the opening section of the piece, published in July 1943, Kenney reiterated the ideas he had told Whitehead about an Air Support Command and his philosophy about the use of air power:

The situation in SWPA does not permit the organisation and employment of an Air Support Command as a separate element of the Air Force. The limited aviation forces available require that these forces be retained under centralised control for employment against objectives which are most important in furthering the plan of the Theater Commander. Whenever ground force action requires close support by aviation, all or a part of the Air Forces effort will be employed for this purpose. The proportion of Air Force effort to be devoted to close support is determined by the Air Force Commander in accordance with directives by the Theater Commander, and with consideration for all the objectives to be attained.<sup>141</sup>

MacArthur, convinced by prior performance of the value of Kenney's ideas and his ability to use air power, apparently agreed with Kenney's formula. There would be no air support command in the Southwest Pacific.

The method of dispersing the air units among different ground commanders was eventually proven unsound in other areas also. The commander of the North African invasion, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, told Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, "coordination in operations involving air units has not been completely satisfactory . . . . I have come to the conclusion that a single air commander is necessary."<sup>142</sup> Upon Eisenhower's recommendation the command

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<sup>141</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, "Standard Operating Procedure for Attack Aviation in Close Support, SWPA," July 1943, p. 9, file 710.4501 HRA.

<sup>142</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years II (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 873-874; Futrell, pp. 136-138.

structure was reorganized and the idea of an air support command was dropped. By April 1943, the tenet of centralized control was codified in War Department Field Manual 100-20 Command and Employment of Air Power, which stated: "CONTROL OF AVAILABLE AIR POWER MUST BE CENTRALIZED AND COMMAND MUST BE EXERCISED THROUGH THE AIR FORCE COMMANDER."<sup>143</sup>

While Kenney no doubt agreed with the idea of centralizing command of the air forces, he disagreed with the division of air power suggested in 100-20. The manual divided the combat forces of an air command into a strategic air force, a tactical air force, and an air defense command. While there was some overlap in the types of aircraft--all three had fighter aircraft--they were envisioned as three distinct entities.<sup>144</sup> While Kenney's command had a bomber and a fighter command, those were for administrative and logistical convenience, not combat operations. For combat he combined his aircraft in the air task forces according to the mission. The task forces could be all of one kind of aircraft, or a mix of fighters, bombers, and transports. It all depended on the task.<sup>145</sup> Like some other officers, Kenney did not believe that an air command should be divided. An airplane should not be considered either a tactical or a strategic airplane, he argued: "I think it is an airplane." "It may drop . . . on targets ten miles away" Kenney continued, "and the next day you may be working

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<sup>143</sup> War Department Field Manual 100-20, Command and Employment of Air Power, July 21, 1943, p. 2. All capital letters in the original.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 4, 8-13.

<sup>145</sup> St. Clair Street, interview with Moore, pp. 2-3; Crabb, p. 7.

5,000 miles away, and to say that one is tactical and the other strategic really doesn't tell the story and . . . uses these two ground terms which we should keep out."<sup>146</sup>

While Kenney dealt with problems in organizing the air task forces, he also made changes in the flying squadrons. The progressive movement of airfields during MacArthur's planned advance through New Guinea demanded that flying units have improved mobility. Kenney organized the flying squadrons into three echelons. The advanced echelon consisted of the men and equipment that preceded the aircraft, either by air or sea transport, to a new air base. They took with them enough supplies and equipment to last for ten days of operations and prepared the landing field for the air echelon which arrived a few days later with the airplanes and crews. The ground echelon contained the remainder of the airmen and equipment in the unit, which followed when transportation was available.<sup>147</sup> This organizational format, possibly inspired by Kenney's experiences in moving to different airfields in the First World War or the exercises he oversaw at GHQ Air Force, made it easier for squadrons to deploy quickly in response to changing situations.

### **The Toribands**

Although the Allied drive against Japanese positions in New Guinea were conducted under Kenney's basic formula, the operations also depended on amphibious landing craft to put the forces ashore. Fortunately, the first attempt at combining air,

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<sup>146</sup> Quoted in Wolk, "Innovator," p. 148. For similar views of other officers see Futrell, p. 138.

<sup>147</sup> Kenney diary, August 30, 1942, KP.

sea, and ground forces in the Southwest Pacific was against the Toriband Islands, territory that had not previously been occupied during the war. These uncontested landings provided a good opportunity to develop and test procedures for the remainder of the war.

The first operations in the Cartwheel offensive were scheduled to begin in June 1943. While the ground soldiers trained for the assault, Kenney's airmen continued to fly combat missions aimed at reducing Japanese air strength and isolating the strongest Japanese position in New Guinea near Salamaua through an air blockade.

Planning for the first phase of the offensive movements in the Southwest Pacific began in early May. The invasion of the Woodlark and Kiriwina islands would be accomplished by "Alamo Force," commanded by Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, the commander of Sixth Army, who arrived in Australia in January 1943.

To support the amphibious assaults on Woodlark and Kiriwana Islands, Kenney planned to use the RAAF Command to protect the eastern sea flank of the islands, while First Air Task force would provide direct support for the invasion.<sup>148</sup> One of the major sticking points in the planning process for this first amphibious assault in the Southwest Pacific was providing air protection for the invasion. While the landing would be unopposed by Japanese ground forces, there was still the possibility of a stiff enemy reaction from the sea and air. MacArthur's intelligence section estimated that heavy air attacks of over one hundred bombers were "probable."<sup>149</sup> Rear Admiral

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<sup>148</sup> Miller, pp. 52-53.

<sup>149</sup> GHQ, SWPA, "G-2 Estimate of the enemy situation 'Chronicle,'" Landers papers, MHI.

Daniel Barbey, the Seventh Fleet Amphibious commander, arrived in Brisbane in January 1943 and was the man responsible for training and organizing the amphibious landings. Barbey argued that aircraft should be constantly overhead the sailing force providing an air umbrella. Kenney, on the other hand, felt that this would tie up too many of his aircraft, leaving them unavailable for other missions. In addition, since the attack was scheduled for dawn, Kenney's forces would have had to take off from the rough, unimproved jungle airfields in the dark, a sure recipe for disaster. Kenney promised, instead, to pound the Japanese air strips prior to the attack and keep his aircraft ready on the ground to respond to any Japanese attacks. Barbey was "skeptical" and "looked with envy at . . . Admiral Halsey's force where carrier planes would provide continuous daylight cover."<sup>150</sup>

There were probably several reasons behind Kenney's reluctance to cooperate with Barbey. One was his confidence in his knowledge about the Japanese which Barbey may not have shared. ULTRA intercepts and other reports had given Kenney an accurate picture of the Japanese air strength and provided early warning of attacks from the Japanese air bases at Wewak and Rabaul.<sup>151</sup> The disagreement between Kenney and Barbey also reflected two different organizational perspectives. Barbey was accustomed to planning with an aircraft carrier nearby dedicated to supporting the amphibious operation. Instead of gaining air superiority over the entire region, a

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<sup>150</sup> Daniel E. Barbey, MacArthur's Amphibious Navy: Seventh Amphibious Force Operations 1943-1945 (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1969), p. 57, also p. 42; Letter, Barbey to Brigadier General H. W. Buse, Jr., Subject: Draft of New Britain Campaign, July 10, 1962, Barbey Papers.

<sup>151</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, February 10, 1943, KP.

carrier only needed air control over a small area at the time of the invasion. In addition, naval carriers would be close enough to the landing area so that an air patrol would protect their "base," the carrier, as well as the invasion force. The close proximity of the carriers also meant that even with a dawn invasion the carrier pilots could take off in daylight. Kenney, on the other hand, had many more tasks to perform than supporting this one operation, defended a much bigger area, and used very rough and unimproved airfields. Dedicating large numbers of his fighters to an air umbrella over the convoy required canceling or delaying other missions. In addition, the long distance from the air bases to the beachhead meant that Kenney's planes spent much of their time flying to and from the combat zone with little time left to engage the enemy over the invasion area.<sup>152</sup> Kenney also maintained that keeping an air umbrella over sea convoy was a "losing game" because the attackers could choose the time and place of the attacker and overwhelm the defenders then on patrol. It made more sense to go after the enemy air force and defeat it than trying to protect against an attack.<sup>153</sup>

Another factor that no doubt affected Kenney's attitude was his general dislike and distrust of the navy. When Barbey arrived at MacArthur's headquarters he commented on the interservice tension he perceived.<sup>154</sup> Another naval officer on

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<sup>152</sup> Interview, Rear Admiral Charles Adair with John T. Mason, Jr., U.S. Naval Institute Oral History Program, February 26, 1975. Washington, D.C., pp. 178-185, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>153</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 21, 1943, p. 3, KP.

<sup>154</sup> Barbey, p. 3.

MacArthur's staff viewed Kenney as the "biggest anti-Navy agitator" in the headquarters.<sup>155</sup> While the source of this attitude is unclear, Kenney's actions were not. He had little patience for naval officers when it came to running air operations and made few efforts to cooperate or get along with them. For example, he and the Allied Naval Commander, Vice Admiral Arthur S. Carpender, had attempted to integrate aircraft and PT boats into the same area in an effort to sink Japanese barges. The effort was short-lived, however, and terminated when B-25s accidentally attacked a PT boat. Kenney blamed the incident on the Navy for not disclosing the location of the ships, and, after this failed effort at cooperation, the commanders resorted to establishing separate areas for their forces.<sup>156</sup>

Kenney was vindicated by the attacks on Woodlark and Kiriwana. The Japanese, probably distracted by Halsey's landing in New Georgia, made no attempt to stop the invasion.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, the landings provided good training, and the islands provided airfields that would be useful later in Kenney's attacks Rabaul and other targets in support of the offensive in the south Pacific theater.

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<sup>155</sup> Letter, Captain Ray D. Tarbuck to Barbey, May 19, 1961, quoted in Gerald E. Wheeler, Kinkaid of the Seventh Fleet (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1995), p. 362.

<sup>156</sup> Kenney diary, June 18, 1943, KP. Suggestively, in Kenney's book he consistently misspelled both Barbey's and Carpender's name. He spelled Barbey as Barby and Carpender as Carpenter. Kenney, Reports, passim.

<sup>157</sup> Miller, pp. 50-58; Krueger, p. 223; Barbey, pp. 65-68; Kenney, Reports, pp. 265-266.

## **Air Superiority and Deception**

The landings in the Toriband Islands were followed by operations under the command of Allied Land Forces commander General Blamey in the Huon Peninsula of New Guinea. The objective for the operation was the town of Lae. The harbor and airfields around the town made it imperative that the Allies control this area before MacArthur could advance further west in New Guinea. The allied plan called for an amphibious invasion of the coast coupled with an assault on the Markham Valley by ground forces airlifted into the combat zone. Before any of these moves could take place, Kenney began formulating the air campaign plan. While he would continue his efforts aimed at isolating the Japanese garrisons in the Lae area, he felt his primary job was "to defeat the Jap Air Force."<sup>158</sup>

The successful interdiction of the sea convoys by Kenney's airmen, as demonstrated in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, made it almost impossible for the Japanese commanders to supply their forces. The Japanese, however, had not given up. Throughout May and June 1943, they began building up their air strength further west in New Guinea near Wewak to contest the Allied advance. They used the airfields around Wewak because they were out of range of Kenney's fighters, but close enough to the invasion area to cause problems for MacArthur's plan. Kenney's task was simple: he had to eliminate the threat posed by the Japanese aircraft before the attacks on Lae could commence.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, June 19, 1943, KP.

<sup>159</sup> Miller, pp. 194-195.



ULTRA information and the wireless units kept Kenney apprised of the buildup at Wewak and the actions of the Japanese aircraft. A detachment of the Australian Army 55 Wireless Section was sent to Wau in February 1943 to provide air raid warnings to Fifth Fighter Command.<sup>160</sup> Japanese units from as far away as Burma and the Netherlands East Indies were being sent to New Guinea. By the middle of May there were over one hundred aircraft in New Guinea, twice as many as a month earlier, and when July ended the number of Japanese aircraft at Wewak had risen to 180.<sup>161</sup> In June, the 6th and 7th Air Divisions were activated at Wewak to control the growing numbers of aircraft and in July the 4th Air Army Headquarters was established.<sup>162</sup>

Kenney's air strength was also increasing. Although the new P-47s he had been promised by Arnold were having developmental troubles, Kenney was still slated to receive a number of aircraft in the coming months. An additional group of P-38s was set to arrive in June along with forty new P-40s and over one hundred B-25s. More P-40s would follow in July and the months after.<sup>163</sup> Even with production delays and various other problems, Kenney had six more fighter squadrons and eight more bomber squadrons in July than he had in January.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ballard, p. 206; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, February 10, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>161</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, Intelligence Summary Number 103, May 15, 1943, Number 123, July 24, 1943, Number 124, July 28, 1943, Number 129, August 14, 1943, Sutherland Papers.

<sup>162</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 79-81, Miller, pp. 45-48; Reports of MacArthur, 2:215.

<sup>163</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, May 11, 1943, KP.

<sup>164</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, pp. 11, 13-14.

Meanwhile Kenney started air preparations for the coming offensive. To prevent the Japanese from sending all their available air assets into New Guinea, and to plant some degree of uncertainty in their minds about the location of future operations, Kenney assigned the RAAF Command the task of tying down the Japanese air units in the Netherlands East Indies. Kenney ordered that the attacks be made in large formations to give the Japanese the false impression that the air strength in the northwestern area of Australia was being built up in preparation for ground offensives against the positions in the Netherlands East Indies.<sup>165</sup> While RAAF Command kept the Japanese distracted, Kenney worked out a scheme to eliminate the aircraft at Wewak.

Wewak was within range of the bombers operating out of the airfields near Port Moresby, but if they were sent to the targets unescorted by friendly fighters, attacks from the Japanese fighters already in place would cause excessive losses. At one point, Kenney wanted to draw the Japanese into a trap by dropping some insulting propaganda leaflets on the Japanese airfields and hoping that they would react to the insults.<sup>166</sup> While this plan never materialized, Kenney set about finding a way for Allied fighters to accompany the bombers from the bases near Port Moresby to Wewak. In order to "dominate the air over the Markham Valley," Kenney needed an airdrome close enough to Wewak to allow fighters to escort the heavy bombers on

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<sup>165</sup> Letter, Kenney to Bostock, May 20, 1943, cited in Odgers, pp. 56-57.

<sup>166</sup> Kenney diary, February 19, 1943, KP.

their attacks.<sup>167</sup> The idea of carving out a forward area in the Markham Valley was not new and one field at Bena Bena was already being used to insert coastwatchers deep into Japanese territory.<sup>168</sup> When Kenney supported the idea of additional airfields, the Australian Air Force and American engineers, who had surveyed the valley in late 1942, were able to provide Kenney and Whitehead with good information on the general layout of the land in the Markham valley.<sup>169</sup> After extensive aerial reconnaissance of the area, more engineers were sent out in early June to examine the area in the eastern part of the valley near a town called Marilinan. The field there could only handle transport aircraft, as it had a hill at one end that required a steep landing approach, and there was no room to disperse the aircraft. An area nearby, called Tsili-Tsili, was judged more suitable for a forward airfield.<sup>170</sup> Kenney opted to build the airfield at the location originally known as Tsili-Tsili (pronounced Silly-Silly) but changed the name to Marilinan so as not to provide fodder for critics in case his plan failed.<sup>171</sup> In any event the installation was only a temporary expedient as the field could only support aircraft during the dry season. When the September rains

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<sup>167</sup> Memorandum, Kenney to Wilson, June 10, 1943; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, August 25, 1943, KP.

<sup>168</sup> Feldt, pp. 181, 187, 194, 199-200, 203.

<sup>169</sup> Franzwa, pp. 137-143, 153; Dod, p. 230.

<sup>170</sup> Captain Everette E. Frazier, "Experiences on the Location of Airdromes in New Guinea," file 733.01 HRA; idem, "Airfield Reconnaissance in New Guinea," Aviation Engineer Notes, March 1945, p. 4, in Corps of Engineers, History Division, military file V, number 25, folder 17, (hereafter these files will be abbreviated as COE military file section, number, and folder) Fort Belvoir, Virginia; June 6, 8, 1943, KP; Colonel Harry F. Cunningham, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Headquarters Advance Echelon Fifth Air Force, "Brief Narrative of Tsili-Tsili (Marilinan)-Lae-Wewak Operations by Advon 5," December 26, 1943, p. 2, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 251-254.

<sup>171</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 253, 271.

arrived the location would not be able to support the weight of the aircraft, but by that time the Allies hoped to be in control of Lae, and Marilinan could be abandoned.<sup>172</sup>

Building an airfield in the Markham Valley demanded protection for the engineers constructing the field from both Japanese ground forces and air attacks. Kenney asked the Australians for a battalion of infantry soldiers to defend against the enemy ground forces. Kenney opted for Australian soldiers because he felt they would have no compunction about placing their soldiers under the command of an airmen. It would have been "unthinkable" for the American Army to have infantry soldiers in the same situation.<sup>173</sup>

A more difficult problem was preventing an enemy air attack. Kenney's fighters did not have the range to attack the Japanese airfields and he did not have enough aircraft to fly constant defensive patrols over Marilinan. Aircraft on ground alert at Port Moresby were too far away to be of any real protection in case of a Japanese air raid. Kenney solved the problem of defending the new airfield by deceiving the Japanese. To draw attention away from the construction at Marilinan, Kenney flew a small number of engineers into two locations further west in the Markham Valley at Garoka and Bena Bena, midway between the Japanese airfields at Wewak and the airdrome under construction at Marilinan. The engineers recruited the natives to help them "raise dust" and create the impression of building a forward airfield. The hope was that the "construction" at Bena Bena and Garoka would draw

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<sup>172</sup> Frazier, "Airfield Reconnaissance," pp. 4-5.

<sup>173</sup> Kenney diary, June 8, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 254.

the Japanese attention away from Marilinan, since reconnaissance aircraft would focus on this point shy of the actual airfield and turn back to base before spotting the activity at Marilinan.<sup>174</sup>

In another attempt at deception Kenney put forth a plan to ambush Japanese aircraft. With construction of the airfields in the Markham Valley underway, Kenney asked General Arnold for two ships that could be painted to look like aircraft carriers. Kenney wanted to sail these ships off the northern coast of New Guinea within range of the Allied air bases. Since he knew that ULTRA intercepts would provide ample warning of a Japanese attack on the boats, he planned to position his fighters to ambush the Japanese as they attacked the "aircraft carriers." "This scheme," he predicted, "will make him come to me."<sup>175</sup> Kenney had high hopes for this plan: "With minimum losses to ourselves, we ought to be able to clean out his whole Air Force out of this theater and then, before he had a chance to replace it, mop up all the shipping within reach in broad daylight, land troops at will anywhere we pleased and really go places in this war."<sup>176</sup>

Although Arnold thought Kenney's idea was a good one, he had no way of supplying Kenney with the ships. Arnold presented the plan to the rest of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who also considered it worthwhile. Unfortunately, shipping was the tightest constraint on Allied operations in the summer of 1943 and there was simply

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<sup>174</sup> Kenney diary, June 6, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 253.

<sup>175</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, June 19, 1943, p. 3, KP.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 4; Kenney diary, June 30, 1943, KP. Kenney also recounts the episode in Kenney, Reports, p. 268.

nothing available in the United States to help Kenney. Arnold and the rest of the Joint Chiefs approved the project, giving it the codename "Horseplay," but told Kenney and MacArthur that they would have to obtain the ships locally.<sup>177</sup>

Kenney, who had not told MacArthur about his plan, had some fast explaining to do when the message from Washington approving the project came in. Besides being somewhat embarrassed, Kenney was also "disgusted" by the way the matter was handled.<sup>178</sup> Arnold should have realized, according to Kenney, that if there had been ships available in Australia he would not have had to ask Washington for assistance.<sup>179</sup> MacArthur, who had grown used to Kenney's ideas after their association over the past year, was nonplused by Kenney's initiative direct to the Washington without informing him. MacArthur supported the scheme and suggested that a barge might be suitable to serve as the carrier decoy. Kenney did not think he could squeeze a barge out of MacArthur's supply chief and dejectedly concluded, "It was a good idea but it is dead now."<sup>180</sup> Still Kenney did not give up. He began scrounging old barges and boats to make a fake invasion force. At the end of August he was still trying to sell others on his plan and tried to get a few destroyers and other boats to make the invasion convoy look authentic. Neither the Allied land

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<sup>177</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 1, 1943; Message, Marshall to MacArthur, July 4, 1943, KP.

<sup>178</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 268.

<sup>179</sup> Kenney diary, July 4, 1943, KP.

<sup>180</sup> Kenney diary, July 4, 1943; Letter Kenney to Arnold, July 26, 1943, p. 4, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 281.

commander, General Blamey, or the naval commander, Admiral Carpenter, who would have had to supply the real boats, thought much of Kenney's plan and he was ultimately forced to cancel this deception scheme.<sup>181</sup> While Kenney deserves credit for his creativity and imagination in tackling his problem of gaining air control over New Guinea, he should have realized that getting a ship from the United States would be no easier than getting one locally. He had attended the Pacific Military Conference where many of the discussions focused on the problems involved with the lack of shipping and its concomitant impact on our combat operations in 1943.<sup>182</sup> In failing to consider this critical shortcoming in his deception plan, Kenney displayed a dismaying forgetfulness about the strategic framework of the war.

Despite the failure of Kenney's carrier scheme, his ruse in the Markham Valley was still holding. As expected, the Japanese discovered the phony construction at Garoka and Bena Bena and made repeated, almost daily, attacks on the area to stop construction.<sup>183</sup> Kenney used RAAF 1 Wireless Unit to track the Japanese flights and knew how far the patrols were flying, allowing him to continue building up the real airfield for as long as possible.<sup>184</sup> On July 8, 4 P-38s, acting on a tip-off from a intercept site, caught ten Japanese aircraft over Bena Bena and shot down two of them.<sup>185</sup> Whitehead was ecstatic about the result and the use of signals intelligence.

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<sup>181</sup> Kenney diary, August 28, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 281-282.

<sup>182</sup> Hayes, p. 316.

<sup>183</sup> Kenney diary, July 6, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 262-263, 267, 269.

<sup>184</sup> Message, Kenney to 1 Wireless Unit, June 12, 1943, quoted in Bleakley, p. 100.

<sup>185</sup> Letter Whitehead to Kenney, July 9, 1943; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 18, 1943, KP.

The results of this mission, he argued, "will furnish further proof, if further proof is needed, of the urgent necessity of getting additional D/F units up here. If we can do this with what we have now, think of the possibilities with better equipment."<sup>186</sup>

In the meantime construction at the airfield at the (new) Marilinan continued at a frantic pace. On June 16 the first three planeloads of infantry and a small group of engineers arrived and four more planeloads landed the next day.<sup>187</sup> The 871st Airborne Aviation Engineers were flown in at the beginning of July and construction on the main runways starting on July 10, 1943. Augmented by native workers, the engineers worked on the field twenty-four hours a day.<sup>188</sup> On July 26 the first group of fighters landed and by the beginning of August a radar warning unit had been established. Conditions at the field were still austere and supplies limited, but it was a start. To control operations at this forward location Kenney activated the Second Air Task Force on August 5 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Malcom A. (Mike) Moore. By the middle of August, the airfield was ready for operations.<sup>189</sup>

Kenney's efforts at flexibility and innovation were clearly evident during the building of the airfields in the Markham Valley. The 1200 men at the airfields were completely dependent on transport aircraft for their supplies. The airfields were so

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<sup>186</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 9, 1943, KP.

<sup>187</sup> June, 16, 17, 1943, KP.

<sup>188</sup> Frazier, "Airfield Reconnaissance," p. 5; Casey, 6:166-167; Dod, pp. 247-249.

<sup>189</sup> Kenney diary, July 10, July 26, August 5, 1943; Cunningham, p. 3, KP. Colonel David W. "Photo" Hutchinson replaced Moore on August 27. Craven and Cate, 4:176.



close to the Japanese complex at Wewak the when large numbers of transport aircraft started flying in and out of Marilinan they needed fighter escorts. The fighters did not have the fuel to circle over the airfield for very long, so Kenney's Air Transport Command developed specially-trained teams that became expert at quickly loading and unloading the supplies from the transports. The Air Freight Forwarding Units practiced unloading and loading supplies into the body of a wrecked transport and cut their times dramatically.<sup>190</sup> Like pit crews at a stock car race, they could have an airplane in and out of the field in no time. The transports had already delivered jeeps to the forward areas, but the airfield construction project needed some big trucks. Kenney's troops devised a method for cutting 2 and a half ton trucks in half so that they could fit into the transports, then flying them up to Marilinan where they were welded back together.<sup>191</sup> The trucks were split behind the cab and a one-wheel dolly was bolted on to the rear half of the cab. After removing the fender, bumper, and windshield, this section was driven up a ramp and into one aircraft while the rear half was shoehorned into a second transport.<sup>192</sup>

Remarkably, the deception plan worked for almost two months, but on August 11 a Japanese reconnaissance flight was spotted over the new airfield. Kenney, appraised by ULTRA intercepts about the Japanese buildup at Wewak and the spotting of the field, knew that it was just a matter of time before the Japanese attacked, so he

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<sup>190</sup> Kenney diary, July 7, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 269-270.

<sup>191</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 270.

<sup>192</sup> "Airborne 2 1/2 ton trucks," Aviation Engineer Notes June 1944, p. 16, COE V, 25, 17.

rushed two more squadrons up to the field.<sup>193</sup> The American fighters did not have long to wait: on August 15 the Japanese attacked with twelve bombers escorted by twenty to twenty-five fighters. Kenney's fighters, alerted by the radar and a wireless unit flown in several weeks prior, met the attackers and shot down six of the bombers and three fighters. The attack was not without losses for Kenney's forces--two transports were hit on the ground along with three fighters.<sup>194</sup> The next day the Japanese returned with between twenty-five and thirty bombers and fighters as a group of transports were landing. The American fighters flying as escorts above the transports managed to shoot down at least twelve Japanese fighters and there were no losses on the ground.<sup>195</sup>

Though not fully supplied, the forward airfield was complete. Kenney did not delay in moving against the airfields at Wewak. Whitehead and his staff had been busy working out plans for the attack and on the morning of August 17, the air offensive against the Wewak airfields began. Despite their knowledge of the forward airfields, the first attack came as a complete surprise to the Japanese at Wewak; almost every one of their aircraft was on the ground and the American attackers met with little resistance. Whitehead and Kenney threw everything they had into the attacks. While the results were not as spectacular as Kenney claimed, they were still

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<sup>193</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, Intelligence Summary Number 129, August 14, 1943, Sutherland Papers; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 83; August 14, 15, 1943, KP. Kenney, Reports, p. 275, places the reconnaissance flight on 14 August.

<sup>194</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 83. Kenney, Reports, p. 276, claims eleven Japanese bombers were shot down.

<sup>195</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, August 25, 1943, p. 1, KP.

impressive: of the 120 aircraft initially on the fields, only 38 were still in flying condition two days later.<sup>196</sup> The number of aircraft destroyed alone did not convey the level of destruction the attacks inflicted or the impact on future operations. While the loss of aircraft was important, the raids also wiped out large quantities of gasoline and supplies that had been painstakingly brought into the base by small barges. While Allied officers were uncertain as to the actual extent of the damage, it was clear to them that the air attacks proved disastrous for the Japanese.<sup>197</sup> Intercept operators soon picked up messages from the Japanese at Wewak telling their headquarters that the base was low on gas.<sup>198</sup>

While Kenney's deception provided the method that allowed him to stage the air attacks on Wewak, the success of his forces was attributable to several factors. Foremost was Kenney's intelligence about the Japanese buildup, which allowed him to concentrate his forces and make a mass attack at the most appropriate moment, literally when the Japanese airfields were full of aircraft. The Japanese Fourth Air Army had built up the 6th Air Division over the past several months in anticipation of an Allied advance and reached its peak strength on August 15, just two days prior to Kenney's first raid.<sup>199</sup> Without this information he would have been forced to make

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<sup>196</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 85; Craven and Cate, IV:178-180. Kenney claimed that there were 225 Japanese aircraft at the four airfields around Wewak and that the first day's attack destroyed over 150. Kenney, Reports, pp. 276, 278.

<sup>197</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, SWPA, Intelligence Summary Number 131, August 21, 1943, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>198</sup> Bleakley, p. 104.

<sup>199</sup> Colonel Rinsuka Kaneko, Imperial Japanese Army, Staff Officer 8th Area Army, July 1943 to August 1943, supply officer, 4th Air Force staff, August 1943 to September 1944, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:405; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 79-81.

recurring attacks on the airfields, depleting his forces for later actions. The Japanese, for their part, were handicapped by a number of problems. Unlike Kenney, they had no capability to read messages and had little knowledge of Kenney's air strength or plans.<sup>200</sup> In addition, the airfields at Wewak had no radar for early warning, so the first indications of an attack were visual observations. Finally, although Japanese commanders were aware of the dangers of putting aircraft in the open at an airfield, they had been unable to build additional airfields or areas in which to disperse their forces because of a lack of heavy equipment. As Allied engineers had discovered, heavy construction equipment such as bulldozers and graders was absolutely essential for carving airfields out of the jungle. By one estimate the work that could be done with one bulldozer was equivalent to 1,000 laborers working by hand.<sup>201</sup> Using this ratio, the 220 pieces of heavy equipment in one American aviation engineer battalion (bulldozers, graders, trucks) and approximately 700 men could accomplish in 24 hours the same amount of work as 50,000 men with hand tools.<sup>202</sup> There was a severe lack on any heavy equipment in the Japanese army; only eight bulldozers were produced in Japan during 1943 and 1944 and there were only three road graders, none

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<sup>200</sup> Weinberg, p. 551.

<sup>201</sup> Major William J. Ellison, Jr. "Advice from the 808th Engineers," September 25, 1943, p. 1, COE X, 116, 4; Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, "Engineer Construction in the Southwest Pacific Area," March 1, 1944, p. 35, COE X, 101, 2.

<sup>202</sup> Ellison, p. 2. For other estimates on the problems faced by the lack of heavy equipment see Hugh J. Casey, Engineer Memoirs Major General Hugh J. Casey U.S. Army (Washington, D.C.: Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1993), p. 119-120. The size and equipment of an aviation engineer battalion is found in Colonel Stuart C. Godfrey, "Engineers with the Army Air Forces," Military Engineer 33 (November 1941): 488-489.

of them motorized, in Japan at the end of the war.<sup>203</sup> The result was that the Japanese had to rely on manual labor, some of it coming from natives or prisoners pressed into service, to build their airstrips. The four airfields at Wewak were tightly packed with unprotected aircraft on the morning of August 14, making them inviting targets for Kenney's airmen.<sup>204</sup> Despite their heavy losses, the Japanese did not stop their efforts. They continued to funnel aircraft from the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies into New Guinea, but without supplies the planes were useless. Intercepted Japanese messages kept Kenney appraised of the Japanese actions and he continued bombing Wewak through the rest of August, but by that time it was clear that the Japanese had little ability to seriously affect the upcoming Allied ground operations in Huon Peninsula.<sup>205</sup>

## Conclusion

Kenney's air operations in early 1943 followed the general scheme he had outlined at the end of the Papuan campaign. Before initiating any ground fighting, Kenney aimed to gain control of the air situation and isolate the area from any reinforcements. Kenney adapted both tactics and weapons to fit the situation in the Southwest Pacific and so produces impressive results. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea effectively isolated New Guinea from large-sized reinforcements that might be sent

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<sup>203</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 82-83; Godfrey, p. 489; S. D. Sturgis, Jr., "Air Power as Affected by Airdrome Construction," Military Engineer 40 (August 1948):355.

<sup>204</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 84-85.

<sup>205</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 283-284; Bleakley, p. 104.

from Rabaul and Kenney's imaginative air campaign in the Markham Valley effectively eliminated the Japanese air threat to MacArthur's planned ground advance. By September 1943, MacArthur was ready to move westward, secure in the knowledge that his air commander had done all he could to prepare the battlefield.

## Chapter Seven

### Isolating Rabaul, October 1943 to January 1944

**"I stick to one basic principle,  
get control of the air situation before you try anything else"<sup>1</sup>**

With Kenney's preliminary air operations complete, MacArthur could now begin moving westward against the Japanese positions in the Huon Peninsula. These attacks were designed to eliminate Japanese forces in the area and establish Allied control over the western portion of the Vitiaz Strait. After eliminating the Japanese from this area in New Guinea, MacArthur's forces would then jump across the straits onto the island of New Britain, completing one-half of the pincer movement around at Rabaul. The first step was eliminating the Japanese positions near Lae and Salamaua. General Blamey, the Allied Land Forces commander, planned to conduct an amphibious invasion of Lae with the Australian 9th Division. To outflank the Japanese strongpoints along the coast, American ground forces would make a parachute assault into the Markham Valley and secure the airfield at Nadzab. The Australian 7th Division would then be flown in Nadzab and fight its way to the coast. Nadzab was, as Kenney put it, the "back door" to Lae.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 21, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>2</sup> Kenney diary, August 18, 1942, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 118-119.

As Kenney and the other commanders planned for these operations, airmen continued to fly a variety of missions. They bombed the airfields and shipping at Rabaul in support of Admiral Halsey's attacks in the Solomons. At the same time reconnaissance patrols and attacks on convoys and barges were ongoing, transport aircraft continued to bring supplies into all areas of New Guinea, and Japanese ground positions around Lae and Salamaua were continually pounded. In short, despite the relative lull in ground combat, the pace of air operations continued unabated.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the planning for the impending operations, Kenney focused on the toll the fighting was having on the aircraft and airmen in his command. He continually worried about not having enough men or machines to carry out MacArthur's plans. Since his return from Washington in April 1943 after the Pacific Military Conference, Kenney wrote frequently to his other boss, General Arnold, to explain his problems. Most of Kenney's complaints centered on the need for more aircraft and more people. Although Kenney was well aware that the national strategic priority was to defeat Germany first, at every occasion he provided evidence about how well he was doing in an attempt to get more of what he needed. Kenney also offering Arnold "solutions" to his problems. He even offered to take partially trained B-24 crews into the southwest Pacific and put them on easy missions, such as submarine patrol and long-range surveillance missions, to give them flying experience and training. After they were

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<sup>3</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 258-259, 266-267.



trained Arnold could send them on to new assignments after having some "easy" combat.<sup>4</sup>

Kenney, perhaps reflecting some of MacArthur's feelings, was convinced that the people in Washington did not understand the demands of a combat theater and his letters to Arnold reflected this attitude. Kenney argued that he needed to have some idea of when replacements would arrive so that he could plan combat operations that were scheduled three to six months in advance. Without knowing what forces he would have he simply could not do the planning.<sup>5</sup> At times Kenney knew he must be exasperating Arnold, and at one point apologized for "continually crabbing about being short...but I am afraid it is about the only way I can present the picture as it confronts me. . . . I know that you are harassed to the point of exhaustion," he continued, "and that you are doing your damndest to keep me quiet but I will trust to your continued good nature and keep on telling you my troubles."<sup>6</sup>

While Arnold was sympathetic and understanding of Kenney's needs, the two often clashed over their different perspectives of the war. For his part, Arnold had to balance the vastly different requirements of many combat theaters and make decisions about tradeoffs between producing more aircraft and making modifications which would slow down production. Kenney, on the other hand, had little sympathy for the problems other air commanders might be facing, and was primarily concerned with his

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<sup>4</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, June 19, 1943, KP.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, July 28, 1943, KP.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

problems in fighting the war. He cared little about future modification and simply wanted large numbers of aircraft. This tension surfaced over many issues throughout the war, some important, others less so. Kenney complained frequently about aircraft arriving with equipment he did not need, such as heaters, or with modifications that he thought were detrimental to the aircraft. He termed the installation of a gun turret on the bottom of the B-24 to defend against fighters attacking from below a mistake. He wanted aircraft without cold-weather equipment which was not needed in the tropics.<sup>7</sup> When he discovered that the co-pilot had been removed from one bomber he was incensed, "I emphatically want provision for the copilot left in the airplane."<sup>8</sup> Despite his penchant for modifying aircraft, Kenney wanted the long-range P-38s so desperately that he asked that no more changes to the aircraft be introduced so that production could be increased. He also fretted that the new aircraft were so different from previous models that they could not be fixed using similar procedures.<sup>9</sup>

Arnold, or more accurately his staff officers who drafted the suggested replies, responded to each of Kenney's complaints. Arnold apologized for the gun turrets on the B-24s, but other areas of the world needed them and it was impossible to build the planes slated for his theater without them; likewise other flying commands needed heating equipment.<sup>10</sup> As to the elimination of the copilot's position, that had been

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<sup>7</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, June 19, 1943, pp. 2-3; September 7, 1943, p. 2, KP.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, September 7, 1943, p. 7, KP.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 16, 1943, p. 2; October 8, 1943, p. 2, KP.

thoroughly discussed and tested and the consensus was that the advantages outweighed the advantages. In addition, Arnold told Kenney that his command had raised no objection to this proposed modification at the beginning of 1943. Arnold also told Kenney that he had already taken steps to stop changes in the P-38.<sup>11</sup>

Kenney also had little appreciation for the tactical differences between his area of operations and others. In particular he pressed Arnold about attack aviation. Based on his experiences in the Southwest Pacific, Kenney believed that the low-altitude, high-speed tactics of attack aviation were still sound and "in evidence every day all over the world."<sup>12</sup> Arnold informed Kenney that his instincts were flat wrong. "Attack tactics," Arnold noted, "have definitely not as you state proven sound 'every day all over the world.'"<sup>13</sup> When such low altitude attacks were attempted in Europe, the results were disastrous; on one mission, eleven out of eleven aircraft were lost. Arnold also told Kenney that wartime experience demonstrated that their pre-war ideas of attack and fighter aircraft were being swept away by technological changes. While fighters had previously been built only for air-to-air combat, they were now being modified to carry bombs and were used successfully in low-altitude attacks. Arnold concluded that under present conditions there was no such thing as attack aviation. While some aircraft might use low-altitude tactics, the classes of aviation were bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance.<sup>14</sup> Despite Arnold's strong response, Kenney

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<sup>11</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 8, 1943, pp. 2-3, KP.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, 19 June 1943, p. 3, KP.

<sup>13</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 5, 1943, p. 2, KP, emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 5, 1943, KP.

continued to badger the Army Air Forces commander. The problems encountered in Europe, Kenney argued, were the result of a lack of forward firing-guns that could suppress the enemy's anti-aircraft fire. He pointed out that his tactics were being used by the Russians and had been used in North Africa.<sup>15</sup> In reality, Arnold's analysis of the situation was more correct than Kenney's. Because of the weakness of Japanese anti-aircraft fire, especially on merchant ships and around the Japanese airfields, Kenney was unaware of the losses capable of being inflicted on large, low-flying aircraft. Low-altitude attacks were being conducted, but they were done by aircraft far different from what Kenney was using.

At the same time Kenney worried about having enough aircraft to support MacArthur's offensive operations, he also found himself occupied with continuing supply problems. When the P-47s finally arrived in Australia they did not have droppable external fuel tanks to extend their range. Without those they could not fly far enough to accomplish any missions in the theater. According to Kenney, "this airplane must have extra gas to go anywhere."<sup>16</sup> Although a drop tank had been developed in the United States, Kenney thought it "junk" and ordered a prototype 200 gallon tank constructed locally and then contracted with Ford of Australia for mass production.<sup>17</sup> Kenney also suggested that the radio equipment be moved from behind the pilot and the compartment then converted into a forty-gallon fuel tank.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, July 28, 1943, KP.

<sup>16</sup> Kenney diary, June 20, 1943, KP.

<sup>17</sup> Kenney diary, June 20, 1943; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, July 31, 1943, p. 1; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, August 25, 1943, KP.

The P-38s that arrived had been outfitted with new very high-frequency (VHF) radios, a change from earlier models that had been equipped with high-frequency radios (HF). Since all of the ground equipment and the other fighters in the area had the older HF equipment, the new P-38s were unable to communicate with anyone else. All of the updated ground equipment had gone to the other theaters, leaving Kenney's forces out in the cold. Kenney was irritated by the failure to properly supply his units which he was convinced showed a complete lack of concern for the conditions he faced in New Guinea.<sup>19</sup> Arnold tried to advise Kenney of the potential problems he faced in insisting on using HF, pointing out that aircraft from the Navy and other allied services were also converting to VHF and that it might have an impact on Kenney's air operations at sometime in the future. Arnold promised to send a team of communication experts to the southwest Pacific to help out, an offer which apparently mollified Kenney.<sup>20</sup>

To add insult to injury, the new A-20s arrived without any forward-firing guns, bomb racks or bomb-bay fuel tanks. Kenney's supply officers spent several weeks scrounging the necessary parts to make the aircraft combat capable.<sup>21</sup> Aircraft carried

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<sup>18</sup> Kenney diary, June 20, 1943; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, July 28, 1943, pp. 4-5; Kenney, Reports, p. 264. Kenney later put a 75 gallon tank into the radio compartment, a move engineers in the United States thought would make the aircraft "very unstable." Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 6, 1943, file 710.3271 HRA; Major General O. P. Echols, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Materiel, Maintenance, and Distribution, to Secretary of the Air Staff, Subject: Letter to General Arnold, November 6, 1943, from General Kenney, December 11, 1943, Arnold Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Kenney diary, June 19, 1943, KP; Letter Kenney to Arnold, June 19, 1943, pp. 6-7, KP.

<sup>20</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 16, 1943, KP.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, August 25, 1943, KP.

on the open decks of ships had to be inspected and cleaned of corrosion caused by the salt water. In some cases the engines were so badly damaged they had to be removed.<sup>22</sup>

Supply problems also occupied Kenney's thoughts during the planning for future operations. The gasoline and bombs used by his aircraft had to compete for transportation with the supplies of every other combat organization. Hence, many of the planning sessions dissolved into negotiations over what should be given transportation priority for an operation. Prior to the attacks on Lae, Kenney warned Whitehead about the need to use fuel stocks from the main airfields at Port Moresby rather than from the forward airfield at Dobodura. Kenney feared that if Dobodura ran low on supplies, they might not be replenished in time for the operations in the Huon Peninsula in early September.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, the air operations continued and the men in the command worked to correct the seemingly endless number of problems that cropped up. At the end of July, Kenney told Whitehead to stop sending raids to Rabaul and begin concentrating on flying to the area around Lae in support of the upcoming operations there. In addition to the operations against the Japanese airfields, his bombers, along with PT boats, harassed the barges that were now being used to resupply Lae. Intercepted radio messages again played a key role in pinpointing targets for the airmen. In late May Kenney received information about shipping between Wewak and

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<sup>22</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, September 7, 1943, KP.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, July 20, 1943, KP.

Lae. He alerted Whitehead who made arrangements to intercept the traffic, but the results were disappointing. The barges were very small and the Japanese fighter cover was heavy.<sup>24</sup> In late July Kenney told Whitehead about a "tremendous amount of radio traffic" between two Japanese ground commanders signaling a major troop movement and Kenney wanted Whitehead to look for barges moving between Madang and Finschaven.<sup>25</sup> Whitehead used the signals intelligence to look for the hideouts used by the barges and focused his search in a relatively small area. In addition, this information allowed him, as it had in the past, to cut down on the numerous, time-consuming reconnaissance patrols and concentrate all of his available aircraft on attacking the proper targets.<sup>26</sup>

As Whitehead worked on the air blockade of Lae, Kenney attended planning sessions for the amphibious invasion. As in the attacks on Woodlark and Kiriwana, there were disagreements between the services over how air operations should be used in the attack. Kenney stuck to his preference of bombing the airfields prior to the start of the operation and put his aircraft on ground alert the day of the attack; Barbey continued his insistence on a standing air patrol.<sup>27</sup> The other argument concerned the time of the attack. Barbey preferred a dawn attack because an assault in the early hours of the day would allow the convoy to sail under the protection of darkness and

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<sup>24</sup> Kenney diary, May 24, 31, June 2, 1943, KP.

<sup>25</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, July 20, 1943, p. 3, KP.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 20, 1943, pp. 3-4; Transcript, telephone conversation between Kenney and Whitehead, October 27, 1942, KP.

<sup>27</sup> Barbey, p. 70-71, 88; Baker, pp. 92-93; Craven and Cate, 4:181.

surprise the enemy. He felt that naval gunfire could be used to defeat any resistance that the ground forces might encounter. Kenney, on the other hand, preferred a slightly later attack time so that his aircraft could takeoff in daylight and bomb the defender's beach positions.<sup>28</sup>

Although General Blamey of the Australian Army was the commander of the operation, he did not have the authority to adjudicate the dispute between Barbey and Kenney. In MacArthur's theater the ground commander of a particular operation was charged with planning and coordinating the actions of the different services, but was not given overall command. Blamey did not have the authority to "order" Kenney to provide an air umbrella or make the decision about the time of the attack; commanders had to cooperate and work around the problem or appeal to MacArthur for a decision.<sup>29</sup> Barbey found the system "unorthodox" and "contrary to the principle of unified command" observed in other combat areas.<sup>30</sup> Still, he had to admit it "worked."<sup>31</sup>

In the discussions about air operations for the Lae attack, MacArthur sided with Barbey and against his air commander on both counts. Why MacArthur went against his air commander's advice is unclear. Perhaps he was not entirely comfortable with

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<sup>28</sup> From: Commander Task Force 76 (Commander Seventh Amphibious Force) To: The Commander in Chief U.S. Fleet, October 23, 1943, Subject Lae Operation, Report Upon, p. 1, Admiral Daniel Barbey Papers, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>29</sup> Krueger, p. 9; Barbey, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Barbey, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Barbey, p. 59.



Kenney's solution and saw merit in Barbey's request. In any event, Kenney was forced to supply an air umbrella for a dawn attack. The number of aircraft deployed was not quite what Barbey had envisioned, and he later complained that there was no standing air cover during the operation. In reality, Kenney allocated thirty-two aircraft to the air umbrella over the convoy.<sup>32</sup> Despite Barbey's victory with MacArthur on this occasion, the debate between Kenney and the Navy over the proper conduct of air support continued throughout the war.

While the clash between Barbey and Kenney centered on air plans for the amphibious landing, there were other factors that also played into the animosity. As usual, the two officers approached the problem from their very different service perspectives. Barbey was also upset by Kenney's representative at one of the planning conferences, claiming that Kenney sent a junior officer who had no authority to make decisions.<sup>33</sup> Kenney was bothered by the lack of cooperation from the Navy in a number of areas. One that was particularly bothersome to him in the summer of 1943 was the fuze used by the navy for their anti-aircraft shells.

The Navy was using a proximity fuze, so named because it allowed a bomb or shell to detonate when it got within a certain distance of the target, while contact fuzes exploded on impact with the target. Kenney hoped to use this kind of fuze to explode bombs above the ground, inflicting more damage on the Japanese bomb shelters.

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<sup>32</sup> Barbey, pp. 70-71 for his complaint. See, "Lae Operation, Report Upon," p. 2 for the air cover provided.

<sup>33</sup> Barbey, p. 71; "Lae Operation, Report Upon," pp. 2, 11-12.

Kenney was aware of the principle behind an air burst, and had advocated the development of such a fuze while at the Tactical School.<sup>34</sup> When he tried to get the naval officers in the Southwest Pacific to share the proximity fuze with him, he was rebuffed. Kenney attempted to develop a proximity fuze locally, but with limited success and eventually wrote to Arnold asking for help.<sup>35</sup> In relaying the navy's answer to him about the fuze Kenney assumed the worst, telling Arnold that British seemed more like allies in the war than the U.S. Navy.<sup>36</sup>

Kenney's distrust of the Navy in this instance was misplaced. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had restricted the use of proximity fuzes to situations where there was no possibility that enemy forces could recover the rounds that did not fire, such as when the Navy used the fuzes over the water. There was some testing of a proximity fuze for bombs underway, but its use was still restricted.<sup>37</sup> General Arnold was very worried about the possibility of the Germans perfecting the proximity fuze which could then be used against the American bomber formations over Germany. According to Arnold, "the enemy would have more to gain than we through the use of proximity fuzes," and turned down Kenney's request.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kenney, "Report on bombing and machine gun firing."

<sup>35</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, May 19, 1943, May 20, 1943; Letters, Kenney to Arnold, July 28, 1943, p. 4, August 25, 1943, p. 4, September 7, 1943, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, August 25, 1943, KP.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, Major General Barney M. Giles, Chief of the Air Staff, to Kenney, August 12, 1943, KP.

<sup>38</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 8, 1943, KP.

Despite some interservice disputes, planning for the invasion of Lae also provided an example of close cooperation between the services in the southwest Pacific. One problem for the attack on Lae was the lack of radar coverage of the invasion area. While Kenney's land based radars, and the signals intercept sites, provided warning about attacks from the west, there were significant gaps to the east and north that could delay warnings of a raid from Rabaul. Wing Commander H. A. Conaghan of the RAAF suggested that a naval ship be used to fill the gap. The destroyer Reid was assigned the task and placed off the coast of New Guinea near Finschafen with Conaghan aboard to control the aircraft.<sup>39</sup>

The actual amphibious invasion of Lae took place on the morning of September 4, 1943. Allied weathermen had correctly predicted that Japanese aircraft on New Britain would be grounded by fog during the morning hours. While two aircraft were able to find their way through the fog, the heaviest attack did not occur until the afternoon. Radar operators on the Reid picked up a large formation of aircraft headed toward the invasion force and sent the aircraft flying overhead, as well as those sitting on ground alert, against the attackers. The Japanese lost about a third of the force but managed to down two Allied fighters and damage two landing craft.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps one of the reasons behind Kenney's grudging support for air cover over the amphibious invasion of Lae was his belief that all MacArthur really needed to

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<sup>39</sup> Lae Operation, Report Upon," p. 7; Barbey, pp. 70-71; Craven and Cate, 4:183, Miller, p. 193; Odgers, p. 75. Kenney does not mention the disagreements over the air cover or the use of the navy destroyer for radar coverage, Kenney, Reports, pp. 291-292.

<sup>40</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 291, mentions about 100 attacking aircraft. Barbey, pp. 80-84 says 70 attackers, while Craven and Cate, 4:183, give no specific number.

carry out his offensive in the southwest Pacific was air power. According to Kenney, no one "appreciate[s] what could be done with air supply in spite of the demonstration . . . in the Papuan campaign."<sup>41</sup> Kenney hoped to validate his vision for winning the war with the airborne attack on Nadzab and the advance up the Markham Valley that would accompany the amphibious attack on Lae.

The plan for the Nadzab assault had originally been to parachute a battalion of American troops to secure the airfield prior to airlifting the Australian 7th Division the next day. On further consideration, Whitehead decided that a battalion would not be large enough to capture the field, protect against any Japanese efforts to retake it, and clear away any obstacles for the air transports to land the next day. Kenney, who was getting resistance from staff officers in the headquarters about the plan, gladly accepted Whitehead's recommendation, and the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment was designated for the attack.<sup>42</sup>

The attack on Nadzab was a tribute to the ability of Whitehead and his staff to plan air operations thoroughly. As Kenney and MacArthur orbited over the landing area, an act that illustrated the level of air dominance the Allies had achieved, six squadrons of B-25s swept thorough the area in good "attack aviation" fashion, strafing and dropping parafrag bombs to take care of any hidden Japanese defenders. Immediately behind the last B-25 came six A-20s flying line abreast laying a smoke

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<sup>41</sup> Kenney diary, March 12, 1943, KP

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 31, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 288; Dexter Report, p. 35; Miller, p. 191.

screen to hide the parachute drop. The 96 transport planes covered by three groups of fighters released the entire parachute regiment of 1700 men in a little over two and a half minutes. Besides one plane that could not drop because of door problems and three deaths caused from failed parachutes, the drop was a picture-perfect operation. Five B-17s loaded with supplies and equipment orbited the area throughout the day and air dropped fifteen tons of supplies. Simultaneously, B-24s and B-17s attacked suspected Japanese strongpoints and other aircraft bombed Japanese airfields in New Britain.<sup>43</sup> Kenney termed the entire operation "a magnificent spectacle."<sup>44</sup>

The next day, transports began flying in the Australian 7th Infantry Division which immediately marched towards the Japanese positions at Salamaua. Kenney's aircraft struck the Japanese ground forces that attacked the Australian advance as it moved towards Salamaua airfield and the town itself. On September 8, General Adachi ordered a withdrawal from Salamaua and began moving his forces to the west to a new defensive perimeter.<sup>45</sup>

### **Finschafen and the Markham Valley**

The rapid fall of Lae and the capture of Nadzab assured Allied control of the lower portion of the Huon Gulf. Substantial Japanese forces, however, still prevented

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<sup>43</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, September 7, 1943, pp. 5-6 KP; Dexter Report, p. 35; Memorandum To Commanding General, Fifth Air Force, From Headquarters Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force, Subject: Plan of Operations for Attack on Lae, July 31, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 291-294.

<sup>44</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, September 7, 1943, pp. 5-6, KP.

<sup>45</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 294-296; Miller, pp. 211-212.

control of the Vitiaz Straits and points west. Allied commanders considered two options for the move west. MacArthur's forces could continue westward through the Markham and Ramu river valleys in the interior of the peninsula or they could conduct more amphibious assaults along the coast and capture Finschafen. Kenney favored the interior option for several reasons. First, operating in the interior offered better locations for forward airfields that could be used to support future operations against Rabaul. The better flying weather in the valley, also meant continuous air operations against Japanese bases. In addition, Kenney felt that this option was quicker and would provide more options for future operations.<sup>46</sup> It was also likely that Kenney knew that operating in the interior would highlight the capability of his forces to transport, supply, and defend the ground soldiers, and their dependence on air power would naturally increase Kenney's importance in upcoming operations. Concomitantly, this option would reduce the importance of the navy and their amphibious craft, a move that would not have displeased Kenney.

While Kenney later intimated that he alone was responsible for supporting this move, the Allied Land Forces commander, General Blamey, was the one who actually presented the plan to MacArthur at a planning conference on September 3, 1943. Undoubtedly Kenney and Blamey had discussed the plan before the formal presentation, because Kenney offered his immediate support and suggested that Blamey's forces could advance even further up the valley by airlifting his troops.

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<sup>46</sup> Kenney, Memorandum to Sutherland, Subject: "Dayton" Plan, September 1, 1943, file 730.322-4 HRA.

Kenney hoped that in doing so he would have an airfield in operation at Dumpu, at the western end of the valley, by November 1, 1943. In the end MacArthur supported Blamey's plan, with Kenney's additions, but despite Kenney's influence with MacArthur, the theater commander also ordered the amphibious assault against Finschafen to occur simultaneously with the inland advance.<sup>47</sup>

The planning for the amphibious attack on Finschafen presented some of the recurring sticking points with the navy. Barbey was upset about losing the two landing craft to a Japanese air attack during the landing at Lae and was adamant about having more aircraft on standing air patrol. According to Barbey, Kenney was humbled by the inability of his aircraft to totally protect the landing at Lae and "after a bit of nudging by MacArthur" agreed to Barbey's request for continuous air patrols.<sup>48</sup> Another point of contention, as before, was the time of the landing. Kenney again argued for an attack after sunrise so that his aircraft could bomb and strafe the beaches prior to the amphibious forces, while Barbey preferred to use the surprise offered by darkness and rely on naval gunfire for protection. This point was again resolved in Barbey's favor and the landing occurred at 0445 on the morning of September 21, 1943.<sup>49</sup>

As promised, Kenney sent large numbers of aircraft, and the Reid again provided the early warning radar coverage for the landing. On the 22nd, the Japanese

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<sup>47</sup> Horner, High Command, pp. 272-273; Miller, pp. 215-216; Kenney, Reports, p. 300.

<sup>48</sup> Barbey, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:187.

threw 70 to 100 aircraft against the landing. Their timing, however, could not have been worse. The aircraft on patrol preparing to leave still had an hour's worth of fuel remaining and the oncoming group had just taken off. The result was that over 100 Allied fighters were available to intercept the incoming raid. The Allied fighters waded into the attackers, shooting down at least forty aircraft. Eight attackers flying at low level, and hence not detected by the radar, were able to attack the Barbey's landing force. Fortunately, no ships were struck.<sup>50</sup> Barbey felt that the experience validated his views of how air power should be used for an amphibious landing, as he smugly noted, "there is nothing like an air cover of friendly planes to save a convoy from possible disaster."<sup>51</sup> While Kenney never admitted it, and continued to argue against the need for a standing air patrol, Barbey won the day.

The invasion of Finschafen was a violent but brief fight and ended with the capture of the town itself on October 2. This did not end the fighting along the northern shore of the Huon Peninsula, as Japanese ground forces that had not been cut off did not surrender, but withdrew to the west in an effort to form a new defensive line in New Guinea. While the attack on Finschafen was taking place, Kenney's forces continued their recurring mission of attacking ships that might be sending

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<sup>50</sup> From: Commander Task Force 76 (Commander Seventh Amphibious Force) To: The Commander in Chief U.S. Fleet, Subject: Finschafen Operation, Report Upon, pp. 8-9, enclosures A, B, Barbey Papers; Barbey, pp. 88-96. An example of the problems with using Kenney's memoir can be seen in this episode. His only comments on the amphibious attack at Finschafen are on this raid. He ignores the planning problems with Barbey, the use of the Reid for early warning of the attack, and the rest of the operation, concentrating, instead, on outlining the operations in the Markham Valley. See Kenney, Reports, Chapter 12.

<sup>51</sup> Barbey, p. 95.



reinforcements or supplies to the Japanese garrisons. The airfields at Wewak and Cape Gloucester in New Britain were also targeted for frequent attacks. Although Kenney claimed to have "wiped out" Wewak at the end of August, he continued attacks throughout September. In a large attack on September 24, over 100 bombers escorted by 128 fighters hit the airfields at Wewak.<sup>52</sup>

These continuing air operations were helped by the construction of more airfields in the Markham Valley. The capture of Nadzab and the development of four airfields in the vicinity transformed the area into the most forward airfields in Kenny's command. Colonel David W. "Photo" Hutchinson and the staff of the Second Air Task Force moved from Marilinan to Nadzab in order to better control the air activities in the Markham Valley.<sup>53</sup> Hutchinson and the commander of the Australian 7th Infantry Division, General Vasey, headed a well-integrated air-ground team that cleared the interior of the Huon Peninsula in just two weeks.

Whitehead and Hutchinson first tried out the airlift plan when thirteen transports flew 250 Australians into Kaiapit where they met and defeated a small Japanese patrol. Whitehead suggested the idea because he was afraid that the normal six days march to Kaipait would allow the Japanese to pour more reinforcements into the area and delay or stop the Allied advance. The use of the transports effectively eliminated this option. In fact, the force the Australians met had been sent out to block

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<sup>52</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 307; Craven and Cate, 4:189.

<sup>53</sup> September 22, 1943, KP; Jared V. Crabb, "Fifth Air Force Against Japan, September 1942-August 1945," February 4, 1946, Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Allied forces from the Markham Valley so that the Japanese garrison at Lae could retreat. The air movement effectively blocked this path to the Japanese, forcing them to retreat through the mountainous terrain, during which they lost 2,600 men and all of their heavy weapons.<sup>54</sup>

Operations to claim the rest of the interior valley followed the same general air-ground pattern as the move to Kaiapit. Infantry troops would be flown into an area by Hutchinson's transports, covered overhead by fighters which could also be used to counter any threatening ground advances. As the infantry eliminated any enemy presence around the field, transports continued to fly in additional troops, supplies, guns, and ammunition, while evacuating the sick and wounded. As this area was secured, a spot ahead was being scouted and a landing site selected for a repetition of the operation. Although the distances between landing sites was often not far, the use of aircraft allowed the Australians to advance faster than the opposing Japanese forces could build fortifications or defensive strongpoints.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of September, Australian ground forces had advanced as far as the intersection of the Gusap and Ramu rivers. This location was transformed into a large base complex designated Gusap and became home to Kenney's Third Air Task Force commanded by Colonel Donald "Fighter" Hutchinson (so-called to distinguish him from Colonel "Photo" Hutchinson, the commander of the Second Air Task Force).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:224-225.

<sup>55</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, September 18, 1943, p. 4, Whitehead papers.

<sup>56</sup> Kenney diary, September 24, 1943; Letter Kenney to Arnold, October 10, 1943, pp. 2-3, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 300-302.

The Australians were pleased with the operation and the work of the fighter and transport aircraft in the Second Air Task Force. They felt that the close liaison between the air and ground units produced through this arrangement and the mobility afforded the ground forces served as a model for future operations.<sup>57</sup> Since the Australians relied on Kenney's air not only for transportation but also for their supplies, this campaign depended on air power. In another sense, however, the airmen depended on the ground soldiers. Without them it would have been impossible to capture or protect the airfields. The operations moved Kenney's air bases, and his ability to provide air cover, closer to the western portion of New Guinea and New Britain, the areas of MacArthur's next operations.<sup>58</sup>

### **Striking Rabaul**

In keeping with the plan outlined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1943, MacArthur's ground operations temporarily halted in order to support Admiral Halsey's South Pacific command. Halsey's forces were set to invade the island of Bougainville, but had to be assured that the Japanese air strength was significantly reduced before his operation. Halsey, Kenney, and their respective staffs met in September 1943 to begin planning a series of combined air attacks on the source of the Japanese air strength: Rabaul.

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<sup>57</sup> Australian Military Forces, "Report by 7 Australian Division on Operation Outlook, September 1, 1943 to September 16, 1943," p. 18, COE, X, 73, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Letter Kenney to Arnold, October 10, 1943, p. 3, KP; Craven and Cate, 4:190-192.

Halsey and his staff suggested that Kenney's forces be used to hit all of the Japanese bases in the area during the last two weeks of October. Kenney argued that since the center of Japanese strength was at Rabaul, it should be the focus of the attacks. But Kenney also knew that any Japanese air strike would raise havoc with the Navy landings on Bougainville scheduled for the end of October. Thus, he agreed to begin bombing Buka to prevent any large air buildup there.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Kenney told Whitehead to "keep an eye on Kavieng" but not to bomb it unless absolutely necessary.<sup>60</sup>

October and November 1943 were devoted to hitting Rabaul. While most of the previous strikes on Rabaul had been done at night or in the early morning (with the exception of General Walker's ill-fated flight), Whitehead had finally convinced Kenney that they should shift to daytime attacks. Whitehead based his recommendation on the increasing loss rate in the night attacks and the slight impact of the bombing. He informed Kenney that the searchlights and anti-aircraft guns installed at Rabaul were making it "a very difficult night target."<sup>61</sup> By July Whitehead was losing "almost 5 percent" of the aircraft on a night mission, caused by both accidents and the Japanese defenses, and he complained about the inability to inflict much damage. He told Kenney that he would prefer daylight missions that could accomplish

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<sup>59</sup> "Notes for Memorandum, Conference between Southwest Pacific Area and South Pacific Area," September 10, 1943, KP; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, October 19, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, October 19, 1943, pp. 1-2, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 312-313.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, February 16, 1943, Whitehead papers.

some significant results even if they had some heavier losses.<sup>62</sup> He termed the almost 7 percent loss rate at night of the specially-modified B-25s "expensive."<sup>63</sup> Whitehead also argued that the capture of Woodlark and Kiriwana islands, and the subsequent construction of airstrips, made it possible for him to use 100 fighters to escort the bombers to Rabaul during daytime and reduce the losses.<sup>64</sup> Kenney must have been overwhelmed by Whitehead's arguments. After examining them, he decided that the change to daylight bombing was in order.<sup>65</sup>

ULTRA intercepts were again a key factor in determining the timing of Kenney's move against Rabaul. While Kenney focused on the Japanese air strength at Wewak during the fighting in New Guinea, intercepted messages kept him abreast of the Japanese strength at Rabaul. He was also aware that the increase in the number of aircraft at Rabaul was part of a Japanese planned air offensive, called the "E" operation, against the Allies.<sup>66</sup> A photo reconnaissance flight on October 11 confirmed the presence of 294 Japanese planes on the airfields around Rabaul.<sup>67</sup> Although not scheduled to begin his attacks on Rabaul until later, Kenney moved against the airfields

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<sup>62</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 18, 1943, pp. 1-2; Letter, Whitehead to Commanding General 5th Air Force, Subject: Night operations by heavy bombers, July 18, 1943, KP.

<sup>63</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, July 20, 1943, p.1, KP. By comparison, the loss rate during the day for the same aircraft was three-tenths of one percent.

<sup>64</sup> Letter Whitehead to Kenney, July 18, 1943, pp. 1-2, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 21, 1943, pp. 1-2, Whitehead papers.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, July 20, 1943, p. 2, KP.

<sup>66</sup> Bleakley, p. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 89; Bleakley, p. 116.

the next day. Intelligence, and Halsey's efforts, made it possible for Kenney to ignore a target for months at a time and then return when it was most advantageous. Without this knowledge, he would have been forced to send many more flights to Rabaul and weaken his efforts in New Guinea. Likewise, if he had not massed his aircraft for an attack on October 12, the Japanese might have wreaked havoc during the landings at Bougainville.

The strike on October 12 was one of the largest and most complicated in the air war in the southwest Pacific: seventy B-24s, 107 B-25s and 12 Australian Beaufighters flew from New Guinea to Rabaul escorted by 117 P-38s, which were serviced and refueled by the RAAF on the newly-prepared airfield on Kiriwana Island captured in June. Although an enormous attack force, by the standards of the theater, the detailed planning was done by First Air Task Force, causing one War Department observer to comment on the "flexibility" of this kind of organization.<sup>68</sup> The low-altitude attack at Rabaul caught the Japanese by surprise. With few losses the Allied airmen claimed to have sunk three large ships and forty-three smaller ones, shot down twenty-six planes, and destroyed at least 100 aircraft on the ground.<sup>69</sup> As usual, Japanese reports of the damage were considerably lower: 3 ships sunk or burning, 29 ships damaged, 15 aircraft destroyed, and 11 damaged.<sup>70</sup> While estimates of the damage vary, Japanese

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<sup>68</sup> Message, Ritchie to Marshall, October 14, 1943, RG4, MMMA.

<sup>69</sup> Kenney diary, October 12, 1943, KP; Gideon, interview with Clearly, pp. 37-44; Kenney, *Reports*, pp. 313-315; Hewitt, pp. 169-175, 182-183. In his book Kenney gives a higher number of allied aircraft.

<sup>70</sup> McAulay, *Jaws*, p. 31; Craven and Cate, 4:321. Naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison provides even lower figures, Morison, 6:275, fn. 4.

officers interviewed after the war agreed that this was one of the most effective attacks on Rabaul and heavily damaged large numbers of aircraft on the ground at the Vuankanau airfield.<sup>71</sup>

Kenney continued the strikes on Rabaul through the rest of October, but bad weather after the initial raid on the 12th frustrated the efforts. Although many of the aircraft had moved to the northern coast of New Guinea, the thunderstorms that built up over the Solomon Sea frustrated efforts to hit Rabaul. If aircraft tried to fly through the storms they encountered vicious turbulence that disoriented the pilots and caused structural damage to the aircraft. Whitehead himself had encountered the problems of flying in the weather with an experienced bomber crew and put out strict guidelines to avoid flights through thunderstorms.<sup>72</sup> Although shut out of Rabaul, aircraft continued to fly missions to other areas and still encountered problems with the weather. On October 16, eight aircraft covering a group of naval ships in the Finschafen area were unable to get back to their bases in the Markham Valley. All the aircraft and about half of the pilots were lost, an event which caused Whitehead to emphasize a point he had repeatedly made: "Weather is still our greatest enemy."<sup>73</sup> By

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<sup>71</sup> Admirals Kusada Jinichi and Irifune Nuosaburo, Commander Hori Tomoyoshi, and Lieutenant Commander Watabe Masamichi quoted in USSBS, Rabaul, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, May 7, 1943, p.2, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 18, 1942, pp. 2,3, Whitehead papers.

<sup>73</sup> Letters, Whitehead to Kenney, October 18, 1943, p. 2; October 21, 1943, Whitehead papers.

the end of the war Kenney's command had lost almost as many aircraft to accidents, caused largely by the weather, as to enemy action.<sup>74</sup>

The weather between New Guinea and Rabaul finally cleared near the end of October and on the 23, 24, and 25, Kenney's flyers staged three attacks against various targets at Rabaul.<sup>75</sup> Despite this sustained effort, and attacks from Admiral Halsey, the Japanese air strength at Rabaul continued to grow. Admiral Koga, Yamamoto's successor as Commander of the Combined Fleet, dispatched 250 to 300 aircraft from Truk to stop the landings at Bougainville, and on November 1 the Japanese made three separate attacks against the landing force, slowing the unloading of the men and equipment.<sup>76</sup>

On November 2, Allied Air Forces were able to hit Rabaul again. Despite thorough tactical planning for the mission, which included the use of phosphorous bombs to create a smoke screen from the anti-aircraft guns, the Japanese met the attack with fierce opposition. Kenney lost 9 of 75 B-25s sent to Rabaul and 9 of the accompanying 57 P-38s. In addition, 4 more aircraft crashed before they could make it back to their bases.<sup>77</sup> He later termed it "the toughest fight Fifth Air Force

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<sup>74</sup> Army Air Force Statistical Digest, p. 258. Of the losses on combat missions in Kenney's command roughly 60 percent were caused by enemy action (1, 488 out of 2, 494, 59.6 percent). By comparison, even with the notoriously bad weather over in Europe the majority of the losses on combat missions in that theater were due to enemy action (9, 654 out of 11, 687, 82.6 percent). Army Air Force Statistical Digest, p. 255.

<sup>75</sup> Kenney diary, October 13, 18, 1943, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 21, 1943, Whitehead Papers, Kenney, Reports, pp. 314-318.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, pp. 248-250; Craven, 4:259-260. Kenney erroneously remarked, "No opposition to the landing was encountered." Kenney, Reports, p. 318.

<sup>77</sup> Kenney diary, November 2, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 319-321.



encountered in the whole war," while Whitehead characterized it as "a real brawl."<sup>78</sup> Some of the losses were the result of the low altitude attacks that Kenney had so ardently championed, on this occasion the heavy gunfire from the ships at anchor proving deadly to the attacking bombers and accounting for all the B-25 losses. Kenney had also seriously underestimated the number of fighters the Japanese had moved into Rabaul, and the P-38s met about twice their number in the sky.<sup>79</sup> All in all, it was a rough day for Kenney's airmen.

Perhaps to compensate for the heavy losses and build up morale, Kenney boasted of the results claimed by the aviators: 114,000 tons of Japanese shipping destroyed or damaged, eighty-five airplanes out of commission, and 300,000 tons of supplies lost. "Never in the history of warfare," Kenney later wrote, "had so much destruction been wrought upon the forces of a belligerent nation so swiftly and at such little cost to the victor."<sup>80</sup> In truth, the results, at least numerically, were much less impressive: the Japanese lost about 20 aircraft and 5000 tons of shipping, while Kenney's losses were considerable.<sup>81</sup> In the end the most important effect of the attacks were not the numbers Kenney cited, but the fact that the mission forced the

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<sup>78</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 319; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 4, 1943, p. 1, file 730.322-5 HRA.

<sup>79</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 4, 1943; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 89-90.

<sup>80</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 319-321, quote on p. 312; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 6, 1943, file 710.3271 HRA.

<sup>81</sup> James, Years, 2:337.

Japanese aircraft around Rabaul to stay there and defend against Kenney's raiders.

They could not interfere with Halsey's landing force at Bougainville.<sup>82</sup>

Kenney's forces returned to Rabaul on November 5 for a combined raid with Halsey's carrier fleet.<sup>83</sup> Halsey's aircraft hit the airfields at 11:30 in the morning and Kenney's bombers appeared an hour later and bombed the town of Rabaul itself. The intense reaction put up three days earlier had taken its toll--only twenty-five bombers were available for the mission. Halsey's raid had drawn off most of the Japanese defenders and Kenney only lost one aircraft.<sup>84</sup> Halsey, who may not have known of Kenney's earlier losses, was incensed by Kenney's effort and "resented the feebleness of his support at this critical time."<sup>85</sup> Weather continued to play havoc with the attacks on Rabaul and forced the cancellation of many missions. Fittingly, the last effort at a combined operation with Halsey's forces to Rabaul on November 11 was hampered by bad flying conditions.<sup>86</sup>

While Halsey and Kenney's attacks did not "wipe out" Rabaul, the dominance of the Allies in the sky and on the sea effectively ended its effectiveness as a barrier to the Allied advance. The Japanese made small efforts to send material to the garrison,

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<sup>82</sup> Miller, pp. 232-234, 248-252.

<sup>83</sup> Craven 4: 259-260.

<sup>84</sup> Kenney diary, November 5, 1943, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 7, 1943, p. 1, Whitehead papers.

<sup>85</sup> William F. Halsey and J. Bryan III, Admiral Halsey's Story (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), p. 183.

<sup>86</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 7, 1943; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, November 7, 1943, Whitehead papers.

and the Allies continued their bombing attacks, but by March 1944 there were few ships and no fighter aircraft to defend the once mighty bastion of Rabaul.<sup>87</sup>

Despite his exaggerated reports, Kenney's successful efforts in the fall of 1943 against New Guinea and Rabaul were welcome news to General Arnold in Washington. Kenney's complaints and the disagreements between the two men in certain areas to the contrary, Arnold still had great respect for Kenney's ideas.<sup>88</sup> "Your letters are always a great help, George," Arnold wrote just prior to the attacks against Rabaul, "You are doing great things."<sup>89</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence of Arnold's esteem for Kenney came in a personal letter Arnold wrote in October 1943 asking for Kenney's suggestions about the use of air power in the cross-channel invasion of Europe. Arnold turned to Kenney for advice, he said, because "there has probably been more ingenuity displayed in your operations than those in any other theater."<sup>90</sup>

After outlining the general situation in Europe and the respective balance of forces, Arnold asked Kenney to consider how the aircraft in England should "be employed in order to get their full effectiveness in the Trans-Channel operations."<sup>91</sup> While Arnold may have been prompted to write Kenney for advice because of his

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<sup>87</sup> Morton, pp. 575-577; Morison, 6:392-409.

<sup>88</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, July 5, 1943,; Letter, Arnold to Kenney, August 31, 1943, KP.

<sup>89</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 8, 1943, KP.

<sup>90</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 11, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

successes in the Southwest Pacific, Arnold was also influenced by events in Europe occurring at the same time. In August, 1943, the American bomber force in Europe began their first large raids into the heart of Germany. On August 17, 315 bombers flew without escorting fighters to strike the aircraft plants at Regensburg and Schweinfurt. The results were disastrous: 60 bombers and 600 men, almost 20 percent of the attacking force, were lost. Throughout the summer bombers made several more raids deep into Germany, again with heavy losses. Ironically, the worst mission of that year occurred on October 14, just three days after Arnold's letter to Kenney requesting advice on the air war in Europe. On that day, 26 percent of the bombers were lost.<sup>92</sup> In comparison, Kenney's heavy losses on November 2 amounted to just over 10 percent of the attack force.

Kenney's reply to Arnold's request was straightforward and provided insight into his view of air warfare. "I stick to one basic principle," he told Arnold: "get control of the air situation before you try anything else."<sup>93</sup> Kenney suggested that the best way to accomplish that goal was to attack the aircraft on the ground and "entice the enemy fighters into combat and destroy them in the air."<sup>94</sup> Kenney recited the recipe he had found successful in the Pacific: attacking airfields at low altitude by strafing targets and dropping the parafrag bomb. Kenney stressed that the bombers

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen L. MacFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, To Command the Sky: The Battle for Air Superiority Over Germany, 1942-1944 (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 127-129.

<sup>93</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 21, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

should be accompanied by sufficient fighter protection, as a rule of thumb at least twice the amount of suspected enemy aircraft, which would be used to protect the attacking force and shoot down the enemy interceptors. Bombers should attack targets that the opposing air force would find necessary to defend forcing them into the sky. The primary objectives of these attacks was not the bomber target, although that too might be important, but the hostile enemy fighters which would be engaged by friendly fighters. Kenney admitted that his plan sounded simple, but in reality it was a "long and difficult job."<sup>95</sup> Kenney closed his letter with this comment of how he viewed the situation in the fall of 1943:

I realize that I am advocating a different scheme of air operation than that now going on in Europe. I realize too that the thesis that Germany may be crushed and forced to capitulate by massed bombing of her industrial homeland may prove to be the correct one by the close of 1943. Frankly I do not believe it but then I do not know the situation in Germany . . . . I have no business inflicting my ideas on another air force commander fighting a different war with a different opponent twelve thousand miles away. But you asked for my opinions, so here they are.<sup>96</sup>

It is tempting to say that Kenney's suggestions had an immediate impact on air operations in Europe, but that assertion is difficult to trace. Arnold was grateful for the remarks and told Kenney that he had passed on parts of the letter to officers on his staff as well as to Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall and the chief British planner for the cross-channel operation.<sup>97</sup> In addition, he sent portions of Kenney's

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 26, 1943, p. 1, KP.

plan to Major General Lewis Brereton who was in England as the air commander for the invasion.<sup>98</sup> Kenney later met with Eisenhower and explained his ideas further, and when Eisenhower asked for one of Kenney's airmen to go to Europe to take part in the air operations Kenney sent Brigadier General Freddie Smith, the commander of the First Air Task Force.<sup>99</sup> What the ultimate impact of these messages were is hard to determine. Certainly Kenney was not the only airman to think along this lines, and it would be easy to exaggerate his influence on events in other theaters, but it is interesting to observe that the tactics used in Europe in early 1944 to gain air superiority closely paralleled Kenney's ideas. The primary aim of the air offensive against Germany became winning control of the air and American fighters had enough range to escort bombers to targets deep inside Germany. The bombers were used to attack targets sure to draw a reaction, such as Berlin, from the German defenders. The most recent study of the air offensive in Europe concludes: "The major contribution of strategic bombing by June 1944 was its role in bringing about the weakening of the Luftwaffe's fighter arm, especially day fighters, through attrition."<sup>100</sup> Kenney was probably not the least bit surprised.

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<sup>98</sup> Letter, Arnold to Brereton, January 19, 1944, Arnold Papers.

<sup>99</sup> January 5, 1944; Transcript, Teleconference between Kenney and Sutherland, January 6, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 342-343.

<sup>100</sup> McFarland and Newton, p. 245.

## Cape Gloucester

Although Kenney had committed most of his force to the attacks on Rabaul in October and November, missions in New Guinea continued unabated. Whitehead pointed out that the naval forces around Finschafen would "squawk to high heaven" at any reduction in the air patrols, and transports were still flying supplies to units in the Markham valley.<sup>101</sup> In addition, Kenney had to guard against Japanese air attacks from Wewak. Although weakened by the previous strikes, the Japanese continued to bring aircraft forward. In the middle of October, Kenney and Whitehead began to receive warnings about the Japanese buildup, and on October 18, just after they started their sustained attacks on Rabaul, thought an attack on New Guinea was imminent.<sup>102</sup> On November 6, the Japanese did strike the airfield at Nadzab, destroying 4 P-39s and damaging 21 others, and strafed the airfield at Bena Bena.<sup>103</sup> Despite the fact that there were more intercept sites in New Guinea, there was no warning prior to this raid and the Japanese made the attack unmolested.<sup>104</sup> As Whitehead pointed out, having intelligence about the enemy's actions was only part of the equation; one also needed the forces to dedicate to the mission. "We knew that Wewak was building up but were unable to do anything about it."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 21, 1943, p. 1, file 730.322-5 HRA.

<sup>102</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 18, 1943, Whitehead Papers.

<sup>103</sup> November 7, 1943, KP.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, September 17, 1943, pp. 1-2, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 7, 1943, Whitehead Papers.

<sup>105</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 7, 1943, Whitehead Papers.

As Whitehead wrestled with the problems in New Guinea, Kenney began focusing on the upcoming invasions elsewhere in the Southwest Pacific. MacArthur planned to secure the western half of New Britain and take control of the Admiralty Islands to complete his encirclement of Rabaul. This plan, approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1943, had been based on completing these landings before capturing Rabaul, but after studying the issue further they concluded that the ability of the Allies to control the sea and the sky made an invasion of Rabaul unnecessary. Instead, MacArthur and Halsey could simply neutralize the base by taking all of the positions around it, a recommendation approved by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at the Quebec strategy conference in August 1943.<sup>106</sup>

MacArthur's original scheme had been to invade the western end of New Britain at Cape Gloucester and to conduct another landing at Gasmata. During the planning sessions Kenney argued that the air and sea strength of the Allies made it possible to control the straits without a ground attack, and strongly urged that both attacks be canceled.<sup>107</sup> MacArthur, however, rejected Kenney's recommendation. Other members of MacArthur's staff, as well as the naval and ground force commanders, all disagreed with Kenney's assessment and felt that controlling Cape Gloucester was necessary. In the end, an attack at Arawe, closer to the western end of

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<sup>106</sup> Morton, pp. 514-520; Matloff, pp. 206-207; Miller, pp. 222-225.

<sup>107</sup> Miller, pp. 272-282; Kenney, Reports, pp. 326-327; Morison, 6:369-370; James, Years, 2:341.



the island, was substituted for Gasmata and occurred on December 15. Cape Gloucester was attacked on December 26, 1943.<sup>108</sup>

In addition to his concerns about the necessity of the invasions, Kenney also had more problems with the Navy in planning the air operations. Barbey continued to worry about the lack of air cover for the amphibious ships. Although Kenney had now acquiesced to supplying an air umbrella for the invasion force it was not enough to satisfy Barbey.<sup>109</sup> Kenney's airmen were upset because they took fire from their own ships every time they flew one of these air cover missions. Brigadier General Freddie Smith, the commander of First Air Task Force and Kenney's planning representative, suggested that the ships not fire at any aircraft over the convoy during daybreak of the invasion day unless the aircraft was positively identified as an enemy. Barbey refused to go along with the suggestion. Kenney agreed with Smith's idea and the problem was resolved after a meeting between Kenney and Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, the Allied Naval Forces commander. Kinkaid, who had seen action in the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway and recently served as the Commander of the North Pacific Force in the Aleutian Islands, arrived in Australia in late November 1943 as the replacement for Vice Admiral Arthur S. Carpender.<sup>110</sup> Kenney and Kinkaid got together and managed to solve the problems. Kenney promised to supply an adequate

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<sup>108</sup> Miller, pp. 273-274; Morison, 6: 383.

<sup>109</sup> Wheeler, pp. 351-352.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 181-227, 295-344.

number of aircraft, and Kinkaid instituted a more restrictive firing policy for naval gunners.<sup>111</sup>

Kenney might have been less worried about Japanese air strikes than the naval commanders because of his knowledge about the early warning network he would have available. Radar sites and wireless units had been installed near Lae and Nadzab to cover the Japanese bases in New Guinea.<sup>112</sup> To provide warning about air strikes from Rabaul, the Allied Intelligence Bureau inserted 16 coastwatchers onto New Britain.<sup>113</sup>

The missions in support of the invasion began shortly after the end of the raids on Rabaul. As usual, Kenney continued his efforts to beat down the Japanese airfields at Wewak and also flew dozens of sorties against the barges forwarding supplies from Rabaul. From November 19 to December 25 Kenney's forces began pounding the defensive positions around Cape Gloucester, flying 1,845 sorties and dropping 3,926 tons of bombs, an effort that even Admiral Barbey termed the "most extensive of any planned to date."<sup>114</sup>

Despite heavy bombing of the Japanese airfields, and the early warning afforded by the coastwatchers and the radio interception sites, the Japanese still managed to put up stiff resistance to the invasions. Coastwatchers provided warnings

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<sup>111</sup> December 24, 25, 26, 1943, KP; Wheeler, p. 352.

<sup>112</sup> Bleakely, pp. 106, 122.

<sup>113</sup> Feldt, p. 226; Ind, pp. 98-100; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 91.

<sup>114</sup> Kenney diary, December 25, 1943, KP; Barbey, p. 119.

of an air raid against the invasion of Arawe on December 16 of at least forty aircraft, followed by at least thirty more the next day. During the landing on Cape Gloucester on December 25, the coastwatchers were against essential in providing about 45 minutes warning before the Japanese attacks.<sup>115</sup> Despite the alerts, and the heavy air cover, the Japanese aviators were still able to inflict heavy damage. In the first attack, at about two-thirty in the afternoon, 20 bombers escorted by 50-60 fighters attacked the shipping. The raid sank one destroyer, damaged three other destroyers and two landing craft.<sup>116</sup> An attack later in the afternoon was less successful; of the 18 torpedo bombers sent out, all were shot down.<sup>117</sup> Undoubtedly the damage to the landing force would have been greater without the coastwatcher's warnings.

Kenney was elated about the effects of the bombing and later boasted about the Marines walking ashore with their rifles on their backs.<sup>118</sup> In this instance Kenney's claim rang true. The massive and sustained bombardment, coupled with the air blockade around the area, had seriously weakened the Japanese defenders, who retreated to Rabaul.<sup>119</sup> While Kenney was happy about the pre-invasion bombing, he tended to downplay the less successful aspects of the operation, especially the losses that the Navy suffered. He commented that the loss of one destroyer led Kinkaid to

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<sup>115</sup> Willoughby, pp. 152-153.

<sup>116</sup> From: Commander Task Force 76 (Commander Seventh Amphibious Force) To: The Commander in Chief U.S. Fleet, February 3, 1944, Subject: Cape Gloucester Operation, Report Upon, pp. 7-12, Barbey Papers; December 26, 1943, KP.

<sup>117</sup> Cape Gloucester Operation, pp. 10-12.

<sup>118</sup> December 26, 1943, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 334-335.

<sup>119</sup> Miller, pp. 293-294.

consider the invasion a "flop," an uncharitable comment perhaps prompted by the two B-25s shot down by anti-aircraft fire from American forces near the landing beach.<sup>120</sup>

### **B-29s in the southwest Pacific**

After the landings on Cape Gloucester, Kenney returned to Washington for another round of meetings on the war. MacArthur's portion of the isolation of Rabaul would soon be completed, and after the capture of Kavieng, Rabaul would be isolated and the units in the South Pacific theater would have no further mission. Kenney arrived in Washington as army and navy planners were discussing how to dispose of the forces assigned to the South Pacific theater. Kenney suggested, based on MacArthur's direction, that the Thirteenth Air Force, the name given to the Army Air Force units based in Halsey's theater, be transferred to his control and used in support of MacArthur's drive through western New Guinea and into the Philippines. Arnold agreed in principle to Kenney's idea, but before he could use the forces the transfer would have to be approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>121</sup> Just prior to leaving Washington, Kenney made a return visit to the White House where he spent two hours with the President talking about operations in the southwest Pacific and presented the President with a book commemorating the November 2 air attack on Rabaul. Kenney found Roosevelt to have a "surprising knowledge" about the area.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Kenney diary, December 26, 1943, KP.

<sup>121</sup> Kenney diary, December 29, 1943; January 3, 1944, KP; Hayes, pp. 544-545.

<sup>122</sup> January 15, 16, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 339-346.

Kenney also spent time with Arnold lobbying him about obtaining some of the new Boeing B-29 Superfortresses for the Southwest Pacific. The idea behind a very long range bomber actually preceded American entry in World War II and the design for the B-29 was submitted in late June 1940. Although the first experimental model of the aircraft did not fly until September of 1942, the decision to begin full-scale production of the aircraft had been made in May 1941.<sup>123</sup> The B-29 was a massive aircraft for its time. It had a wingspan of 141 feet and the plane was 99 feet long and almost 28 feet high. The most impressive aspect of the aircraft, especially from Kenney's perspective, was the range of the aircraft. Engineers initially estimated that it could fly 3,500 miles carrying 8,000 pounds of bombs.<sup>124</sup> The best performance Kenney had coaxed from the B-24s, with less than half that payload, was a 2400 miles trip from Darwin, Australia to the oil refineries at Balikpapan in Borneo, a group of targets he longed to strike.<sup>125</sup>

Kenney's assignment at Material Command from 1939 until 1942 exposed him to the specifications and development of the B-29, and during his time in the Pacific he

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<sup>123</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, Army Air Forces in World War II, vol. 5, The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 6-7.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>125</sup> Stanley L. Falk, "General Kenney, The Indirect Approach, and the B-29s," Aerospace Historian 27 (Fall 1981):151. B-24 data based on figures in Craven and Cate, 4:169. Historian R. J. Overy's comparison of bomber aircraft lists the maximum bombload of the B-24 as 8,000 pounds and the B-29 as 20,000, and their respective ranges as 2,100 miles and 4,200 miles. R. J. Overy, The Air War, 1939-1945 (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), p. 113. Note that during World War II an aircraft could not carry its maximum bombload and reach its maximum range at the same time. There was a tradeoff between bombs and fuel and a heavier bombload restricted the distance an aircraft could fly. Conversely, the further the target, the fewer bombs could be carried.

kept abreast of the aircraft's development through his meetings in Washington and letters with General Arnold, as well as his associates at Material Command.<sup>126</sup> A few months after his arrival in Australia Kenney began campaigning for the new bomber. He told Arnold that the key to victory over Japan was in eliminating or neutralizing their ability to use the natural resources found in the Netherlands East Indies, Malaya, and the Philippines. The best way to accomplish this goal, Kenney believed, was through air power.<sup>127</sup> While Kenney presented Arnold with strategic rationale for assigning B-29s to the Southwest Pacific, he also dropped hints about more mundane matters in the hope that this would sway Arnold. In late 1942 Kenney had received the first squadron of B-24s and discovered that their wheel base was four feet wider than the B-17, as a result all of the taxiways on the airfields in New Guinea had to be widened to handle the new bombers. This difficulty prompted Kenney to tell Arnold, "I have no idea what the tread on the B-29 is and suppose that it will be some time before I see one of them, but that will be another thing to remember for airdrome construction."<sup>128</sup>

Kenney made no mention about the aircraft until the summer of 1943 when he queried Army Air Forces headquarters about information on the aircraft for building airfields. In late July, perhaps promoted by reports about the B-29 test flights, he told

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<sup>126</sup> For example, letter, Kenney to Colonel Alvin Crawford, December 9, 1942, p.2, KP. Also, Craven and Cate, 5:12.

<sup>127</sup> Falk, pp. 147-149.

<sup>128</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 10, 1942, p. 4, KP.

Arnold: "I assume that I am still to get the first B-29 unit,"<sup>129</sup> and requested information about the aircraft to properly plan for its arrival.<sup>130</sup> In his reply, Arnold cautioned Kenney against placing too much emphasis on getting the aircraft, telling him that "no units are scheduled for your theater prior to June of next year [1944]," while at the same time intimating that the aircraft might be sent to Australia after to that date.<sup>131</sup>

Arnold's answer was a bit deceptive because, in reality, he had no desire to send the aircraft to the southwest Pacific: he intended to use them against the home islands of Japan. As early as March 1943, Arnold had initiated studies in Washington about using bases in China. Using as basic assumptions the date at which the aircraft would be ready for combat, the current rate of advance in the Pacific, and the desire to end the war against Japan one year after victory in Europe, air planners concluded that there would not be any islands close enough to Japan by the fall of 1944. Basing the aircraft in China would not only bring the Japanese homeland into bombing range, it would also improve the morale of the Chinese and, hopefully, keep them in the war, important political goals for President Roosevelt.<sup>132</sup> On August 20, 1943, during the Quadrant strategy conference in Quebec. Arnold submitted a proposal to the

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<sup>129</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, July 28, 1943, KP.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, August 31, 1943, KP.

<sup>132</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:17; Hayes, pp. 492-494.

Combined British and American Chiefs of Staff on basing the B-29s in China for raids against Japan.<sup>133</sup>

Although the initial proposal turned out to be too optimistic in terms of the amount of supplies required, the basic concept of using the aircraft from bases in China had the political support of the President and seemed to offer another avenue for quickly defeating Japan. At the Sextant strategy conference in November, Roosevelt approved the concept and on November 10, 1943 asked Prime Minister Winston Churchill and China's President Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek for assistance.<sup>134</sup> The Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to supply construction units for building the air bases by the middle of January 1944 and hoped to begin bombing operations by the first of May 1944.<sup>135</sup> The Chinese bases, however, only offered an interim solution, the real hope for the defeating Japan lay in capturing the Marianas Islands in the Central Pacific. The Chiefs of Staff estimated that the B-29s would be flying from these islands by the end of 1944.<sup>136</sup>

Although Kenney was not aware of exactly what was going on with the B-29s, he knew enough people to receive hints that Australia was not being considered for the B-29s. In October 1943, he complained to Arnold, "I have been hearing a lot of rumors recently about the destination of the B-29s . . . I understood that the first B-29s

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<sup>133</sup> Hayes, pp. 470-471.

<sup>134</sup> Hayes, p. 497; Craven and Cate, 5:18-23.

<sup>135</sup> Hayes, p. 490; 498-500; Craven and Cate, 5:23-24; Matloff, pp. 377-378.

<sup>136</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:26, 28-30.



were coming to me."<sup>137</sup> Rather than dealing with Kenney honestly about his plans, Arnold asked how Kenney intended to use the aircraft. Kenney swiftly replied and outlined his plan for hitting the Japanese oil production centers at Palambang and Balikpapan and using the bombers to hit shipping. The disruption of the flow of oil and recapturing the Philippines, Kenney argued, could bring about an end to the war.<sup>138</sup> Kenney also analyzed the problems in using the aircraft in other areas and told Arnold that supply problems in China would hamper operations and it would prove difficult to build air bases in the Marianas.<sup>139</sup>

Kenney doubtless believed that his letter would sway Arnold because preparations to receive the aircraft continued. In preparation for building an airfield at Darwin, engineers received information on the B-29, including its weight, turning radius, and the desired airfield dimensions.<sup>140</sup> Kenney began his own investigation of airfields and areas for supply and repair depots to handle the mammoth aircraft. He told the officer charged with the task that although the decision to send the aircraft to Australia had not yet been made, Kenney thought it possible that they might have 35 B-29s as early as March 1944.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 10, 1943, p. 6, KP.

<sup>138</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 29, 1943, quoted in Falk, pp. 150-151.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific, "Technical Memorandum 3," October 11, 1943, COE X-101-3.

<sup>141</sup> Letter, Kenney to Colonel V. E. Bertrandias, October 30, 1945(sic)[1943], KP; Engineers, 6:18.

Soon after writing his letter to Arnold about using the B-29s, however, Kenney received word that none of the aircraft would be headed to the Southwest Pacific. Major General Barney Giles, currently serving as Arnold's chief of staff, sent Kenney the news in November 1943. Giles had known Kenney from their days at Fourth Air Force in early 1942 and Kenney had recommended Giles as his successor. With Arnold away at the Sextant conference, Giles wrote Kenney about the decision and tried to offer some conciliation. "Your letter," Giles told him, "constituted a very strong case for your theater,"<sup>142</sup> but "after weighing all of the factors involved, allocation of the B-29s to the Fifth Air Force is not contemplated."<sup>143</sup> Despite the seemingly firm rejection, Giles added a postscript to the letter which urged Kenney to continue planning for the aircraft. "There is always the chance the decision may be changed" Giles counseled, and he felt confident that Kenney would eventually get some of the B-29s.<sup>144</sup> While Giles's letter was intended to mollify Kenney, it did not dampen his efforts. On his return from the Sextant conference General Marshall and planners from the Joint Chiefs of Staff stopped in Australia. During the visit Kenney crossed swords with Major General Haywood S. "Possum" Hansell, a staff planner for Arnold and fervent believer in strategic bombardment, about the use of the B-29s.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Letter, Giles to Kenney, November 18, 1943, Arnold Papers.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Kenney diary, December 13, 1944, KP. For insight into Hansell's background and beliefs see, Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler (Atlanta: Higgins-McArthur/Longino &

In addition to his efforts at gaining control over the 13th Air Force during his trip to Washington, Kenney must have also been hoping for kind words about the B-29s. On January 14, he met with Arnold and discussed, among other items, the issue of sending B-29s to Australia. Although an observer at one meeting noted "General Arnold could not commit himself on routing any B-29s via Australia. He will think about it."<sup>146</sup> Kenney took a more optimistic view of Arnold's comments, somehow getting the impression that fifty B-29s were bound for Australia.<sup>147</sup> Kenney returned to Australia shortly after his meeting with Arnold and upbeat about the prospect of obtaining the aircraft. He asked the engineers to give immediate priority to building an air depot and lengthening the runways at Darwin to handle the new bombers. A feat they estimated would take eight to nine months to complete.<sup>148</sup>

Shortly after his return to southwest Pacific, Kenney, along with Sutherland and Chamberlin, attended a conference at Pearl Harbor to discuss operations in the Pacific for the next year. The meetings revolved around the best plan to defeat Japan. The offensive through the Central Pacific, commanded by Nimitz, was slated to attack

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Porter, Inc., 1972), and idem, The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986).

<sup>146</sup> Colonel William L. Ritchie, Memorandum for General Kenney, "Notes on Conference in General Arnold's Office, January 14, 1944," January 15, 1944, KP.

<sup>147</sup> Falk, p. 153.

<sup>148</sup> Engineers, 6:18-19. Although the runway was lengthened and strengthened to handle the B-29s, the isolation of Darwin caused other problem in bringing supplies to the area. The terminal where the oil was delivered, for example, was four miles from the field and the pipeline used to carry fuel to the airfield was already at maximum capacity. The engineers estimated that to have enough fuel for the B-29s they would need to install another pipeline and build two large storage tanks. Kenney's version of events overstates his authority over construction matters in Australia and overlooks the construction problems. Kenney, Reports, pp. 341-342.

the Marianas Islands and Formosa enroute to Tokyo, while MacArthur planned on continuing his advance through New Guinea, then move north and liberate the Philippines before invading Japan. Although both routes would defeat the Japanese, the end would come much quicker if the forces were concentrated on one axis of attack. The two staffs started out favoring different plans, but by the end of the meeting both groups favored combining their forces and recapturing the Philippines.<sup>149</sup> The most important argument employed by Nimitz's staff in the meetings for invading the Marianas revolved around using the area as a base for the B-29s. Kenney strongly disagreed with the proposal and maintained that missions by the B-29s from the Marianas Islands would simply be a "series of costly stunts."<sup>150</sup> Kenney termed the last meeting a "regular love feast" and felt that their recommendations would force the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consolidate forces under MacArthur.<sup>151</sup> How important Kenney's opinion on the aircraft was to the overall outcome is uncertain, but it probably had some impact. Its not hard to imagine that his remarks were not well receive by General Arnold or other members of his staff in Washington.

At the conclusion of the meetings in Hawaii Sutherland flew to Washington to sell the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the revised plan.<sup>152</sup> Despite the unanimity reached by

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<sup>149</sup> Matloff, pp. 455-457.

<sup>150</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, Box 46, Murray Green Collection; Kenney diary, January 27, 1944, KP. Hayes, p. 547, provides a slightly different quote.

<sup>151</sup> Kenney diary, January 27, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, Murray Green Collection; Kenney, Reports, p. 348.

<sup>152</sup> Matloff, pp. 457-459; Craven and Cate, 4:551-552.

the planners in the Pacific, Sutherland faced a tough sales job in Washington. Chief of Naval Operations Ernest King strongly supported the central Pacific thrust, as did Arnold.<sup>153</sup> Conceivably, Kenney's hopes for the B-29 could have received a boost from a study done by the Joint War Plans Committee about this time that concluded that prior to capturing the Marianas Islands, the bombers would be better employed in the southwest Pacific and not China, but their recommendation came to naught as the President had already committed the airplanes to China.<sup>154</sup>

### **Reconnaissance in Force**

As Sutherland winged his way to Washington, Kenney returned to the southwest Pacific. The next operation in the southwest Pacific was an invasion of the Admiralty Islands scheduled for late April, 1944. The Admiralties are a group of islands about 200 miles northeast of Wewak. The two most important islands in the group, Manus and Los Negros, were separated only by a narrow strip of water. Capturing Manus Island would completely sever the air and sea lanes to Rabaul and provide a deep harbor to support future operations. In addition, the islands had two airfields, one on Manus called Lorengau, and a 5000 foot runway on Los Negros at Momote.<sup>155</sup> MacArthur originally planned on invading Manus in April and Whitehead had already started the standard pattern of preinvasion bombing. On February 6,

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<sup>153</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:552-554.

<sup>154</sup> Hayes, p. 592; Craven and Cate, 5:28-31.

<sup>155</sup> Miller, pp. 317-319.

1944, a post-flight report from a mission over the island mentioned that there had been no enemy anti-aircraft firing. Soon other missions reports were reporting similar things. On February 23 Whitehead sent three B-25s to the island with orders to fly around at low altitude and try and draw fire. After ninety minutes of low-altitude flying, and seeing no sign of life, the crews concluded that the island had been deserted. In reality, the Japanese commander had ordered his men to stop firing and stay out of sight.<sup>156</sup>

Kenney saw this as a golden opportunity for MacArthur to speed up his return to the Philippines. A quick grab of the Admiralties might convince the planners in Washington that MacArthur should get more resources and swing the on-going debate towards defeating Japan by invading the Philippines. From his visit to Washington, Kenney undoubtedly knew that General Marshall was pushing for more pressure on Japan and wanted to quicken the pace of the war.<sup>157</sup> Kenney argued that the reports indicated the island was deserted and could be invaded immediately. To prevent any embarrassment in case things went wrong, Kenney told MacArthur that he could call it a "reconnaissance in force" rather than an invasion.<sup>158</sup> MacArthur, who quickly grasped the implications of the move, did not need much prompting. On February 25 he issued the orders for a reconnaissance in force and four days later the first troops landed. Reports from advance parties and ULTRA indicated that Kenney's assessment

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<sup>156</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead. February 24, 1944; February 24, 1944, KP; Craven 4: 558-559; Miller, pp. 319-321.

<sup>157</sup> Matloff, pp. 326-333.

<sup>158</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 360.

was wrong and the place was, as one report put it, "lousy with Japs."<sup>159</sup> Kenney, however, downplayed any contrary evidence, arguing that "the report meant nothing" and "if there are 25 Nips in those woods at night, the place would be 'lousy with Japs.'"<sup>160</sup> MacArthur pressed ahead with the attack.

Kenney was certain that there would be no interference from Japanese aircraft. The bombing of the Japanese airfields at Wewak made it little more than a staging base and there were no working aircraft on either Los Negros or Manus. Just to be sure, he asked Whitehead to have some P-38s over the landing area the morning of the attack and to bomb the airfields at Wewak.<sup>161</sup> As added protection Kenney also had available the services of the RAAF's 1st Wireless Unit which had moved to Nadzab in early February. They would be able to monitor the Japanese radio frequencies and provide early warning about a Japanese air attack on the landing.<sup>162</sup> Kenney's hunch about possible Japanese air reactions were confirmed the next day when the analysis of signals intelligence confirmed that there had been no movement of Japanese aircraft from Hollandia to Wewak.<sup>163</sup>

In many ways Kenney's recommendation was fortuitous. Although the Japanese had not abandoned the island, the Japanese commander had positioned his

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<sup>159</sup> February 28, 1944, KP.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.; Kenney, Reports, p. 361.

<sup>161</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 24, 1944, KP.

<sup>162</sup> Bleakley, pp. 115, 125.

<sup>163</sup> Kenney diary, February 28, 1944, KP.

forces on the large island of Manus to defend Seedler Harbor, what he considered the most likely target for an attack. Instead, MacArthur's reconnaissance in force sailed through Hyane harbor on Los Negros and quickly surrounded the main objective there, the airfield at Momote. The smaller "reconnaissance in force" surprised the Japanese who were awaiting the usual massive seaborne invasion force.<sup>164</sup> Although it took until the end of March to clear Los Negros, and fighting did not officially end on Manus until the middle of May, the main objective, the Mamote airfield, was ready for use in March. In short, Kenney's suggestion was extremely risky, but it outflanked the Japanese main force and conformed to MacArthur's desires to speed up his advance.<sup>165</sup>

## Conclusion

The capture of the Admiralties and Halsey's operations in Kaveing completed the encirclement of Rabaul. Although the base still held almost 60,000 troops, without control of the sea and air they could do little to effect operations. Thus, they were left to "die on the vine." MacArthur could now turn his attention to defeating the remaining Japanese forces in New Guinea before invading the Philippines and moving on to Japan. Kenney anticipated that the stepping-stone pattern of operations that had gotten MacArthur's forces this far would remain the same. Kenney would gain control of the air, then begin an air blockade and start attacking the defending forces on the

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<sup>164</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:244-245.

<sup>165</sup> Spector, Eagle, pp. 283-284; Miller, pp. 347-350; Morison, 6:432-448.



ground. After a sufficient softening up, an amphibious or airborne invasion would secure the next landing strip that would support the next advance. This was the pattern he had preached through the drive westward in New Guinea and he saw no reason for it to change.

Future operations, however, would present Kenney with some new challenges. His forces would increase, but he would still encounter problems getting adequate numbers of aircraft into combat. More importantly, the next operations would require Kenney to mesh his operations with aircraft carriers.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Westward to Hollandia, January to October 1944**

**"I consider it unwise to rely on carrier units completely"<sup>1</sup>**

Capturing the Admiralty Islands marked the end MacArthur's efforts at isolating Rabaul. With his right flank secure, he could now move westward in New Guinea and on to the Philippines. Based on the previous pattern of MacArthur's operations, dictated largely by the range of Kenney's aircraft, MacArthur's next attack would occur someplace around Hansa Bay in New Guinea. Kenney and Whitehead, in fact, had begun making plans for taking Hansa Bay prior to capturing the Admiralty Islands. Basing his plan largely on weather forecasts, which predicated bad flying weather from the middle of March until mid-April, Whitehead proposed attacking the Wewak airdromes from January 25 to February 15, followed by an invasion of Hansa Bay and the building an air base to occur sometime before the middle of March.<sup>2</sup> Based largely on Whitehead's advice, Kenney pushed for a late April date, and

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Kenney to CinC Southwest Pacific Area, July 11, 1944, Subject: Application of the Reno V Plan, Phases I and II, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, Subject: Climatic Conditions and Future Operations, January 9, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

MacArthur's headquarters complied by tentatively scheduling the invasion of Hansa Bay for April 26, 1944.<sup>3</sup>

To support the invasion of Hansa Bay, Kenney gained some additional aircraft from Thirteenth Air Force then flying in the South Pacific area under Admiral Halsey. During his trip to Washington in January 1944, Kenney lobbied for control of these air units when they finished operations against Rabaul. In March 1944 the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the transfer of Thirteenth Air Force and other Army units from Halsey to the southwest Pacific.<sup>4</sup> In managing air operations over this widely dispersed area, Kenney continued to rely on Whitehead as the Fifth Advon commander and the air task forces. Both had proven themselves as useful tools in conducting air operations in the southwest Pacific, yet Kenney could not get official recognition of them, forcing him to take officers from flying squadrons and move them into the headquarters to plan missions. While the organizational framework improved flying operations, the lack of manpower in both the flying units and the headquarters wore officers to a frazzle.<sup>5</sup> On his first trip to Washington in March 1943, Kenney submitted a proposed plan for the air task forces and argued that the conditions in the southwest Pacific required three echelons of command (5th Air Force, Advon, and the Air Task Force) and a concomitant increase in the number of officers.<sup>6</sup> Neither the Army Air Forces

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<sup>3</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 21, 1944, KP.

<sup>4</sup> Hayes, pp. 566-567.

<sup>5</sup> "Notes to discuss with General Arnold," September 24, 1942, KP; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, October 29, 1943, p. 1, KP.

<sup>6</sup> Kenney to Ritchie, April 14, 1943, p. 4, KP.

headquarters nor the War Department was as enthused as Kenney about the benefits of an air task force. In late 1943 the War Department decided, over Kenney's objections, that the headquarters of bombardment wing would provide suitable for an Air Task Force and on February 1, 1944, First Air Task Force was renamed as the 308th Bombardment Wing, the Second became the 309th Bombardment Wing, the Third the 310th Bombardment Wing.<sup>7</sup> Although the names of the organizations changed, they functioned the same as the old air task forces and controlled many different types of aircraft for various periods of time depending on the operation. In this regard these three bombardment wings were unlike similarly named wings in any other theater which only contained bomber aircraft.<sup>8</sup> Every operation in the southwest Pacific would have an air task force, only with a different name.

## **Hollandia**

The predictable pattern of MacArthur's operations changed dramatically in early March when he announced that he planned on bypassing the strong enemy force defending Hansa Bay and, instead, stage a two-division assault at Hollandia sometime between April 15 and 24, 1944.<sup>9</sup> Hollandia, located in an area known as the Netherlands New Guinea, was lightly garrisoned by the Japanese and seemed an ideal location for building a large base in western New Guinea capable of supporting future

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<sup>7</sup> Letter, Kenney to Commanding General, United States Army Forces Far East, October 23, 1943; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, October 29, 1943; November 2, 1943, p.2; February 1, 1944, KP.

<sup>8</sup> St. Clair Street, interview with Moore, p. 2; Crabb, p. 7; Herring, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, March 6, 1944, p.1, Whitehead papers.

operations. The town of Hollandia itself was located on the western side of Humboldt Bay, the only large natural anchorage along the northern coast of western New Guinea, and served as the capital for this area. The surrounding region, also called Hollandia, contained two deep bays, Humboldt Bay to the east and Tanahmerah Bay to the west, separated by the Cyclops mountain range which had peaks up to 7,000 feet. To the south of the mountain range was a flat plain which led to Lake Sentani and then onto rolling hills and jungle in the interior jungle of New Guinea. Although there were few ground forces in the Hollandia area, the Japanese were using it as a rear supply base and hacked four airfields out of the jungle on the Lake Sentani plain to defend their defensive perimeter in western New Guinea.<sup>10</sup> (Figure 3)

On March 5, MacArthur radioed the Joint Chiefs of Staff about his plans. At the same time MacArthur's chief of staff, Major General Richard Sutherland, was still in Washington attempting to sell the Joint Chiefs on the plan agreed to by the Pacific planners in January to consolidate the Allied advance through the Philippines. Although the Joint Chiefs approved MacArthur's plan to skip Hansa Bay, they maintained the two prong approach to defeating Japan; MacArthur would liberate the Philippines while Nimitz would stage an advance in the Marianas Islands. Kenney was "dumbfounded" by a decision which rejected a plan that he, other the other planners in the Pacific, considered sound.<sup>11</sup> Kenney was also upset because the judgment also meant the end of Kenney's hopes for B-29s. Throughout Sutherland's visit, Kenney

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Ross Smith, The Approach to the Philippines (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953), pp. 16-18.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 371.

continued his efforts at undermining the appeal of the B-29 raids from the Marianas on Japan. He thought that the problems involved with supplying the giant aircraft made the plan "absurd" and the attacks would prove to be little more than "nuisance raids."<sup>12</sup> Ironically, the day prior to this decision by the Joint Chiefs, Kenney sent a message to Washington reporting that the airfield at Darwin would be ready for the B-29s on May 1, 1944.<sup>13</sup> Despite a seemingly clear rejection for Kenney's plans, he did not give up hope and continued to make plans for using B-29s.

At the moment, however, most of Kenney's attention would be focused on the upcoming invasion of Hollandia. Although the Japanese had suffered a huge set-back after the isolation of Rabaul, they were determined to hold their defensive perimeter in western New Guinea. The commander of the Japanese Eighteenth Army, Lieutenant General Adachi, anticipated that since MacArthur had heretofore only advanced under the cover of Kenney's air the most likely place for an attack was somewhere between Madang and Aitape and he concentrated his forces near Hansa Bay.<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese also redoubled their efforts at reestablishing control of the air in New Guinea. The goal for aircraft production in 1944 was set at 40,000 planes and military planners hoped to increase the number of airfields in western New Guinea from 27 to 120 by the summer of 1944. In reality, both plans suffered from shortages

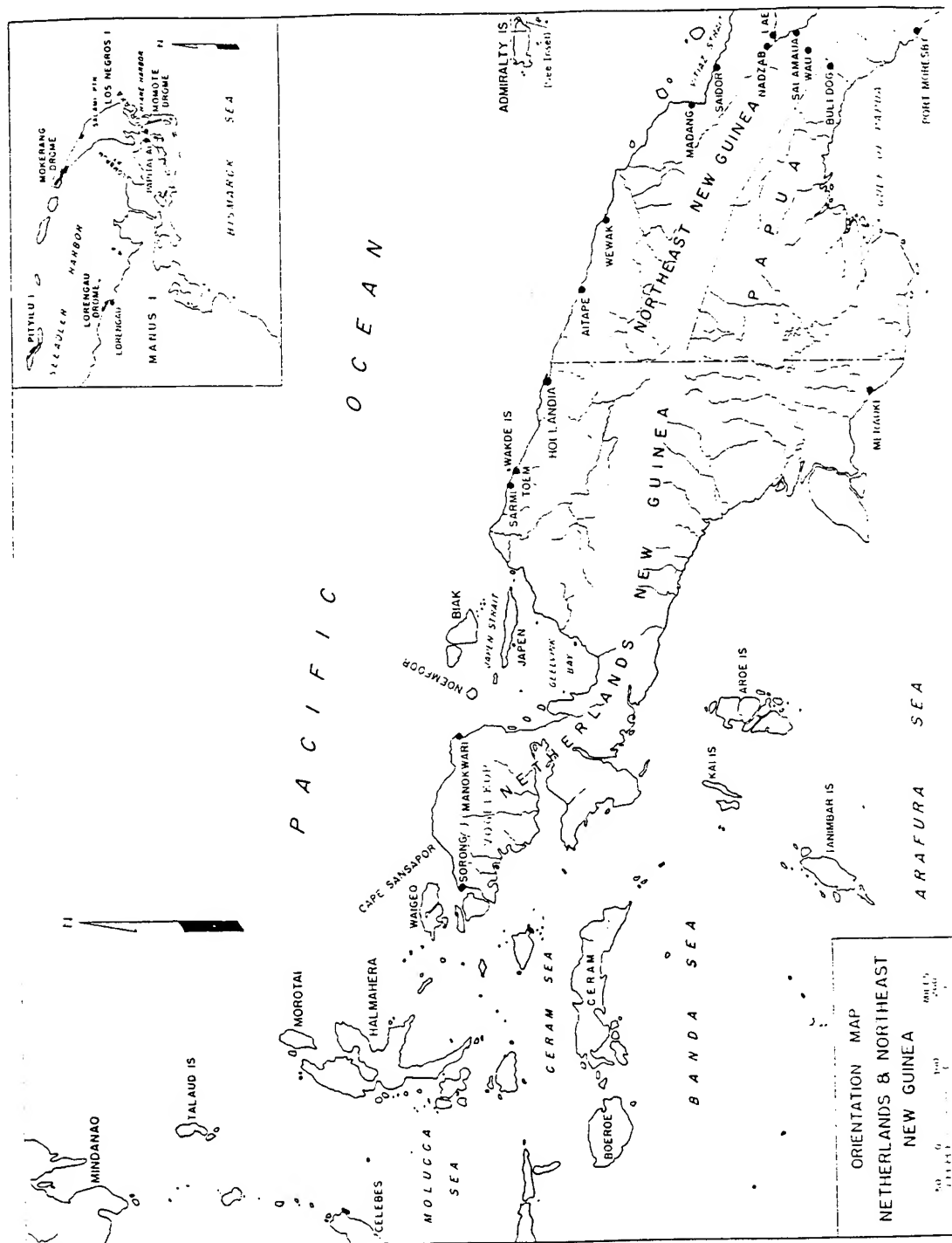
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<sup>12</sup> Kenney diary, February 19, 1944, KP; Message, MacArthur to Sutherland, February 16, 1944, Sutherland Papers, NA.

<sup>13</sup> Kenney diary, March 11, 1944, KP; Hayes, p. 595.

<sup>14</sup> Reports, 2:263.

Figure 3--Netherlands New Guinea<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup> Engineers, 6:210.

in material and manpower. Aircraft production in the first four months of 1944 lagged behind the required amounts, and airfield construction got nowhere as shortages in heavy equipment, materials, and transportation continued to plague the Japanese air war efforts. Of the 35 new airfields slated for construction in New Guinea, only nine were completed by April 1944.<sup>16</sup> The inability of the Japanese to build new airfields helped simplify Kenney's operational decisions. With a limited number of targets he could afford to hit every one. Bringing large numbers of aircraft into the theater only made the problem worse for the Japanese since they were forced to pack their aircraft onto a few fields, making them vulnerable to an enemy air attack.

MacArthur gave the impression that his move to bypass Hansa Bay for Hollandia was a bold stroke of genius, it is probably no coincidence the main task force was codenamed "Reckless," but the decision was actually based on extensive knowledge about the Japanese plans. Despite the continuing efforts by Central Bureau to collect and decode Japanese radio communications, throughout 1943 they had only been able to exploit, to any great extent, the codes and ciphers used by the Japanese Navy. The codes and ciphers used by the Japanese army had, so far, proven impossible to crack. But in April 1943 Central Bureau broke the Japanese Army Water Transport Code, important for pinpointing shipments sent overwater, and in January 1944 obtained a trunk full of Japanese Army code books. Soon Central Bureau was reading almost every message sent by the Japanese Army. When MacArthur made his decision to bypass Hansa Bay and attack Hollandia, he did so based on the knowledge

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<sup>16</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2: :248-251, 257-258.



that the bulk of the Japanese 18th army was waiting for him at Hansa Bay, while Hollandia was only lightly garrisoned.<sup>17</sup>

While Kenney supported the idea of speeding up MacArthur's advance, and had planned on proposing that MacArthur bypass Hansa Bay, he did not envision leaping beyond the range of his aircraft.<sup>18</sup> The new plan would give Kenney responsibility for eliminating the Japanese air strength at Wewak and Hollandia, but naval aircraft carriers would actually cover the invasion. Neither Kenney, nor his deputy Whitehead, was happy about relying on the carriers. Although their concerns could be dismissed simply as out of professional jealousy or bureaucratic bickering, in fact both had legitimate worries about the plan. Kenney argued that carrier-based aircraft, in comparison to his land-based bombers, could only spend a short time over their targets, had limited range, and carried small bomb loads which did not provide enough firepower during the bombardment prior to an amphibious attack.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the carriers themselves had to periodically stop flying operations to refuel, rearm, and replace lost or damaged aircraft. "Carrier based aircraft," Kenney later remarked, do "not have . . . staying power and therefore do not have the dependability of land-based

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<sup>17</sup> Edward J. Drea, "ULTRA Intelligence and General Douglas MacArthur's Leap to Hollandia, January-April 1944," in Intelligence and Military Operations, ed. Michael I. Handel (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp. 324-328; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, February 24, 1944, p. 2, KP.

<sup>19</sup> Letter, Kenney to CinC Southwest Pacific Area, July 11, 1944, Subject: Application of the Reno V Plan, Phases I and II, file 730.161-3 HRA. Kenney voiced another complaint on August 16, 1944, KP.

aircraft."<sup>20</sup> Although Kenney's assessment contained some valid points, he also overlooked some of the benefits involved with the carriers.

During World War II three different types of carriers were developed. The standard carrier was 750 to 800 feet long and carried about 100 aircraft. The "light" carriers, which were built on cruiser hulls, were only 600 feet long, and had about 50 aircraft. The smallest carriers, called escort or "Jeep" carriers, had an air compliment of less than 30 aircraft. These ships were built on the same size hull as a merchant ship, about 500 feet, and were originally designed for escorting convoys or transporting aircraft, but had proven useful in augmenting the carrier task forces in the Pacific by providing air cover and close air support during amphibious assaults.<sup>21</sup> No matter what size the carrier, each could move to where they were needed, making the range of the aircraft less important than aircraft limited to land runways. In addition, the naval gunfire from other ships in the task force compensated for the small bomb loads that Kenney mentioned. Although Kenney may have understood these benefits, his retained a negative attitude about the carriers and maintained that they would not be able to "remain in the Hollandia area for more than a few days."<sup>22</sup> If the airfields in the area could not be ready for Kenney's aircraft quickly, which he was not convinced

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<sup>20</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, p. 6, KP.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas J. Cutler, The Battle of Leyte Gulf, 23-26 October 1944 (New York: Haper Collins Publishers, 1994), pp. 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, March 6, 1944, p. 2, Whitehead papers. Kenney claimed that it was his idea to bypass Hansa Bay and invade at Hollandia, but given his trepidation about the plan, especially the reliance on the aircraft carriers, it seems unlikely that he would have proposed such a move. Kenney, Reports, p. 369.

they would be, and the carriers had to leave, then the ground forces would be sitting ducks for Japanese air attacks. To preclude such a fiasco, Kenney asked Whitehead to investigate the possibility of developing airfields short of Hollandia.<sup>23</sup>

Whitehead agreed completely with Kenney's assessment and provided a detailed explanation of the problems involved with the operation while investigating two other methods for supporting MacArthur's plan. Whitehead dismissed the engineer's optimistic reports about getting the airfields ready for operations and argued that it would take three weeks after the invasion for the airfields at Hollandia to be made ready for one fighter group, "we should have no illusions about speedy airdrome construction" he warned Kenney, while the carriers would have to leave three days after the invasion.<sup>24</sup> In order to neutralize all of the enemy air bases, cover the invasion force after the carriers departed, and support the ground attack Whitehead suggested that the airfield at Tadj, near the town of Aitape, be used to support the main attack.<sup>25</sup> Another possibility was to develop an airfield on Manim Island, Wharibe Island, or Wuvulu Island all located off the north coast of New Guinea and within range of Hollandia for Kenney's planes. None of the three, however, had terrain fit for an airfield.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, March 6, 1944, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, "By-Passing Hansa Bay-Wewak-Tadji Areas," March 7, 1944, p. 2, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; Ennis C. Whitehead, "GHQ Modified Plan 'D'," March 7, 1944, Whitehead papers; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 9, 1944, pp. 1-2, KP

<sup>26</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:769, fn. 17.

While the general outline of the Hollandia plan was first presented on March 3, detailed planning continued throughout the month. Many of the discussions concerned integrating the carriers with Kenney's land-based air and were finally resolved at a conference on March 23 and 24.<sup>27</sup> There was no possibility of a single air commander for the invasion, which would have required communications that were simply unavailable at the time. Even within Kenney's own organization, he could not control daily operations at airfields in New Guinea from his headquarters in Brisbane. The distance, weather, and radios simply did not permit it. Instead, he supplied the overall guidance for operations over a period of several days and relied on Whitehead at the Advon headquarters and the air task force commanders for conducting daily flight operations. Another obstacle to having a single air commander was the attitude of the participants. Its hard to imagine Kenney, with his anti-Navy sentiments, giving Halsey control over the land-based aircraft. It is equally difficult to believe that the navy would surrender control of the carrier aircraft to Kenney. Apparently neither side gave the idea of a single air commander much credence: instead the planners concentrated on working out ways in which to support the invasion without integrating naval and land-based aircraft.<sup>28</sup>

The primary objective for the Hollandia landings was to control the three airfields in the Hollandia area, located behind the Cyclops Mountains just north of Sentani Lake, about 15 miles from the coast. Capturing the Hollandia airdromes fell to

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<sup>27</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:583-584.

<sup>28</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 373.

the Reckless Task Force commanded by Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger. He planned a two-pronged pincer attack. The 41st Division would land at Humboldt Bay on the east side of the Cyclops Mountains and, after passing through the mountains, would drive west towards the airfields, while the 24th Division landed at Tanahmerah Bay and enveloped the airfields from the west. Eichelberger planned to make the Tanahmerah Bay landing the main effort and the 41st Division at Humboldt Bay was given the task of distracting and holding any enemy force in the area that might interfere with the drive from the west. As Whitehead suggested, part of the invasion force would also attack at Aitape 120 miles southeast of Hollandia and quickly capture the airfield at Tadjil. This ground force, called the Persecution Task force and consisting of two regimental combat teams, would also be in position to block any attempt by the Japanese 18th Army to move westward from Hansa Bay.<sup>29</sup>

Three different groups of aircraft had to be managed for this operation. One group contained Kenney's Allied Air Forces, the second aircraft from the Fifth Fleet carrier task forces commanded by Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, and the last group of aircraft was from the smaller escort carriers normally assigned to Admiral Nimitz's command, but loaned to Admiral Kinkaid, the Allied Naval Forces Commander, for this operation.<sup>30</sup> Up until the day prior to the invasion (D-1) there were no big changes to Kenney's operations. His units would be responsible for reducing the

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Approach*, pp. 29-32, 43; *Engineers*, 6:237.

<sup>30</sup> Headquarters Advance Echelon Fifth Air Force, "Plan of operations in support of the Aitape-Hollandia Operation," April 1, 1944, in Air Evaluation Board, Southwest Pacific Area, "Report Number 24, Hollandia-Aitape Campaign" May 10, 1946, file 138.8-24 HRA (hereafter AEB 24); Report on Tanaherah [sic] Bay-Humboldt Bay-Aitape Operation, May 6, 1944, pp. 1-6, Barbey papers.

Japanese air threat at Wewak and Hollandia, destroying shipping along the northern coast of New Guinea, and reducing the enemy ground defenses in the Hollandia area. During this period there were no restrictions over when or where his aircraft could fly. At the same time the Fifth Fleet carriers (Task Force 58) would bomb the Japanese air bases in the Caroline Islands.<sup>31</sup> At 0430 on the day prior to the invasion, Fifth Fleet carriers would take over responsibility for operations from just west of Aitape to the main landing areas at Humboldt and Tanahmerah Bay. The aircraft from the escort carriers would remain east of Aitape and cover the landing for the airfield at Tadjj.<sup>32</sup> The Fifth Fleet carriers would leave the area two days after the invasion and the escort carriers would shift westward and cover the ground forces in the Hollandia area for the next three weeks. Kenney's units were restricted east of Aitape, unless they were on missions to areas in western New Guinea far away from the Hollandia area, and had to remain overland during the hours of darkness. The commanders also agreed that the boundary line could be disregarded by common agreement, an arrangement that was assisted by the exchange of liaison officers to the carriers and to Whitehead's headquarters.<sup>33</sup> This geographical separation of forces might have been the only arrangement possible given the radio communications of the time and the attitude of the participants, but the arrangement codified a tacit agreement not to combine the air units except under extraordinary circumstances.

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<sup>31</sup> "General Headquarters Operations Instructions Number 46," March 28, 1944, in AEB 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.; the actual dividing line was 141 degrees, 30 minutes east longitude.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid; "Headquarters Allied Air Forces Operations Instruction Number 49" March 30, 1944, in AEB 24; Barbey, pp. 161-162.

Although planning for the attack at Hollandia continued throughout March, Kenney had already begun air operations aimed at isolating the Japanese. His primary task was "to take out the air from Wewak to Hollandia and keep it beaten down so that aircraft from the carriers escorting the expedition can handle any Jap attempt to bust up the convoy."<sup>34</sup> The strength of the Japanese air bases in western New Guinea represented a significant threat to the success of the operation and naval officers were especially skittish about operating their carriers for an extended period of time in close proximity to enemy air bases.<sup>35</sup> During a meeting in late March, Nimitz reiterated his concerns about the Japanese air threat, but Kenney flatly assured the naval officers that he would have the Japanese aircraft "rubbed out" by April 5, a claim that many of the participants in the meeting, according to Kenney, found difficult to believe.<sup>36</sup>

To carry out his primary task of eliminating the Japanese air threat, Kenney assigned specific missions to the various air components he commanded. He ordered Bostock and RAAF Command to pin down possible Japanese air reinforcements that might be flown into Hollandia by attacking Japanese air installations in western New Guinea, the Arafua Sea area, and the Netherlands East Indies.<sup>37</sup> With the end of active operations in the south Pacific theater, Kenney hoped to use Thirteenth Air Force, but a shortage of shipping prevented the movement of all the supply and headquarters units

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<sup>34</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, March 6, 1944, Whitehead papers.

<sup>35</sup> "G-2 estimate with respect to an operation against Hollandia," February 14, 1944, pp. 4-5, Lander papers, MHI.

<sup>36</sup> Kenney diary, March 23, 26, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 377; James, Years, 2:399-402.

<sup>37</sup> "Headquarters Allied Air Forces Operations Instructions Number 49," in AEB 24.

in this command. Kenney requested some of the flying units as soon as possible and set up Thirteenth Air Task Force as a headquarters and Admiral Halsey agreed to release two bomber groups, the 5th and the 307th, in April.<sup>38</sup> Kenney planned on sending both groups to the Admiralty Islands and using them for attacking airfields on Woleai Island to the north, assisting the ground forces in New Britain, and conducting air searches north of the Admiralty Islands.<sup>39</sup> Kenney convinced Halsey of the need for more long-range reconnaissance aircraft in MacArthur's area and a squadron of PB4Ys (naval B-24s) was moved to the Admiralty Islands. Although these aircraft belonged to the Navy, because they were land-based they followed Kenney's directions for operations, something he had insisted on with all of the land-based naval aircraft.<sup>40</sup>

The actions of RAAF Command and Thirteenth Air Task Force were primarily aimed at keeping the Japanese forces to the north and south of New Guinea occupied. The Fifth Air Force concentrated on eliminating the Japanese air units along the north coast of New Guinea. Before tackling the air complex at Hollandia, however, Kenney eliminated the Japanese aircraft at Wewak and continued to attack ships bringing supplies to the Japanese garrisons.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> March 29, 1944, April 9, 10, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 4:586.

<sup>39</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces Operations Instructions Number 49.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, interview with Moore, p. 5; Kenney, interview with James, p. 2; "Headquarters Allied Air Forces Operations Instruction Number 49;" Headquarters Advance Echelon Fifth Air Force, "Plan of Air Operations in Support of the Aitape-Hollandia Operation," April 1, 1944 in AEB 24; Smith, p. 26; Samuel Eliot Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume 8, New Guinea and the Marianas (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953), pp. 49-51.

<sup>41</sup> "Allied Air Force Operations Instruction Number 49."



Allied domination in the air made it impossible for the Japanese to base aircraft at Wewak for any period of time. Instead they kept the bulk of the aircraft at Hollandia and flew them to Wewak for fuel and bombs just prior to a bombing mission.<sup>42</sup> Kenney was determined to eliminate this possibility and throughout March his flyers pounded Wewak with 1362 sorties and 2,434 tons of bombs. The Japanese put up some feeble resistance, but by the middle of March had abandoned any efforts at maintaining their presence at there and retreated westward to Hollandia.<sup>43</sup>

As the flyers bombarded the airfields at Wewak, Kenney began planning the elimination of the Japanese air bases near Hollandia. His planning was made easier by the exceptionally clear picture obtained by signals intelligence which kept Kenney apprised of the size of the Japanese air garrison on the airfields and the Japanese buildup of their forces in western New Guinea in anticipation of a forthcoming Allied attack.<sup>44</sup> By the beginning of March the messages revealed that new aircraft flown into Hollandia pushed the total number over 250, but at any one time only about half of those aircraft were available for combat.<sup>45</sup> Kenney relayed all of this information to Whitehead who proved somewhat less enthusiastic about the intelligence, telling

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<sup>42</sup> Bleakley, pp. 126-128.

<sup>43</sup> Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, A-2, Headquarters Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force, Memorandum to: Commanding General, March 29, 1944, KP; Air Evaluation Board, Southwest Pacific Area, "Report Number 23 Neutralization of Wewak, 11-27 March 1944," May 10, 1946, pp. 33-34, 143-144, file 138.8-23 HRA.

<sup>44</sup> Drea, "Leap," pp. 333-335.

<sup>45</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, March 10, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 109.

Kenney that they were facing twice the number of aircraft that Kenney thought.<sup>46</sup>

Even if the Japanese were able to concentrate the force that Whitehead feared, the Allies still maintained numerical superiority over the Japanese. At the end of February there were 803 fighters and 780 bombers in Fifth Air Force and while only three-quarters of them were in condition for combat operations, this amount was still more than the Japanese could muster. With the RAAF's contribution--probably about 150 aircraft--Kenney had a clear numerical superiority over the Japanese.<sup>47</sup>

In some ways the numbers of aircraft were misleading because most of the Japanese aircraft could fly from bases close to the invasion area at Hollandia while Kenney's were far away. Although the bombers could reach Hollandia, none of the fighters had enough range to accompany them that distance and Kenney intended to stick with his policy of using the fighters to accompany the bombers to prevent unacceptable losses.<sup>48</sup> The search for airfields closer to Hollandia had come to naught, but newer model P-38Js arrived which obviated the need for finding a new airfield. The larger fuel tanks on the new P-38s gave the twin-tailed fighters a combat range of 570 miles, enough to escort the bombers all the way to Hollandia and back.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, there were too few of these aircraft for Kenney's taste and he pushed the Air Service Command into manufacturing large external tanks for the older model

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<sup>46</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 12, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>47</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:579-580; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 3, 1942, KP.

<sup>49</sup> Yoshino, pp. 64-65. The older H models had a range of 430 miles.

fighters. Hoping to lull the Japanese into a false sense of security, Kenney told Whitehead to restrict the P-38s and not allow them to go as far west as they could.<sup>50</sup>

The original plan for the attacks on Hollandia was based on small night harassment attacks starting in the middle of March, with larger raids beginning on March 28, 29, and 30.<sup>51</sup> These plans were dramatically changed on March 29 when Central Bureau intercepted a message from the Japanese 4th Air Army commander Lieutenant General Kunachi Teramoto. Teramoto ordered the airplanes flown out of Hollandia to Noemfoor and Biak--a move that would have been disastrous for MacArthur's plans.<sup>52</sup> Operating from Biak Japanese aircraft could attack the aircraft carriers and amphibious craft bringing troops to Hollandia, but they would be beyond the reach of Kenney's aircraft. Fortunately, the officers working in Central Bureau quickly grasped the importance of the message and passed it to their chief, Major General Spencer Akin, who handed it off to Kenney. Kenney, in turn, flashed the information to Whitehead and told him to attack the airfields as soon as possible.<sup>53</sup>

Although the aircraft did not attack until noon the next day they completely surprised the Japanese who never expected such a large sized force or that fighters would arrive escorting the bombers.<sup>54</sup> Kenney's flyers returned to Hollandia over the

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<sup>50</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 373-374.

<sup>51</sup> March 21, 1944, KP.

<sup>52</sup> Bleakley, pp. 133-134.

<sup>53</sup> Bleakley, pp. 133-135; Raynor, pp. 242; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 23, 109-112; Drea, "Leap to Hollandia," pp. 330-336,

<sup>54</sup> Captain H. Komoto, Imperial Japanese Navy, November 12, 1945, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 1:288-290; Lieutenant Colonel Nobuo Kitamori, Staff Officer (Communications), Second Area Army, quoted in Reports of MacArthur, 2:263, fn. 44.

next few days, bombing aircraft, shooting them down in the air, and destroying fuel, supplies, and repair facilities on the ground. Because the Allies planned to use the same airfields that the Japanese were now occupying, most of the bombers had been loaded with small fragmentation bombs which, it was hoped, would damage the aircraft on the ground, but not dig deep holes in the runway which the engineers would have to repair. In addition, the aircrews were specifically told to concentrate on destroying the aircraft and do a minimum amount of damage to the runways.<sup>55</sup> That the attacks destroyed large numbers of aircraft on the ground is certain, but the precise number is difficult to determine. There was no doubt that the raids eliminated the Japanese air threat to the attack at Hollandia.<sup>56</sup>

Excellent intelligence combined with sound planning and execution explain a large part of the successful attacks on the airfields, but Japanese weaknesses also played a role. Handicapped by the continued lack of heavy equipment, the construction engineers were never able to clear enough ground to disperse the aircraft, making them extremely vulnerable to air attacks. In addition, the Japanese only had a very rudimentary network for providing warning about the air raids and no central command center to consolidate the information and make decisions, a weakness exacerbated by the loss of a convoy carrying a radar warning unit to Hollandia earlier

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<sup>55</sup> AEB 24, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Komoto, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 1:288-290; Craven and Cate, 4: 594-595; Drea, "Leap," p. 336. Kenney, Reports, pp. 380-381. Kenney makes no mention of the signals intelligence.

in the month.<sup>57</sup> As a result, on March 30 the Japanese were refueling some of the aircraft sent up earlier in the day and only had eighteen minutes warning of the Allied attack, not enough to flush the aircraft into the air or send up a strong force of defensive aircraft.<sup>58</sup>

Even though the Japanese had flown in large numbers of aircraft to Hollandia it was, in many respects, a hollow force. By March of 1944 the Japanese Army and Navy lacked trained pilots, the result of delaying the expansion of the pilot training programs and a shortage of aviation fuel which limited the amount of training that could be done.<sup>59</sup> There were enough pilots to ferry the aircraft into Hollandia, but the units did not have pilots to fly them.<sup>60</sup> The Japanese were also plagued by maintenance problems, some self-induced, others inflicted by the campaign against their shipping routes. The air units lacked trained workers and spare parts to fix the aircraft and they could not bring in the heavy equipment necessary for tasks such as swapping out aircraft engines or other repairs. One Japanese supply officer estimated that at the time of Kenney's attack on Hollandia only about a quarter of the aircraft were capable of combat flying: the rest had been grounded for a lack of spare parts.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 110; Drea, "Leap," pp. 332, 336.

<sup>58</sup> Bleakley, p. 134; Colonel Rinsuka Kaneko, 4th Air Army headquarters, Imperial Japanese Army, II:407; Drea, "Leap," p. 336.

<sup>59</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air, pp. 34-36, 42; Overy, pp. 95, 138-145.

<sup>60</sup> AEB 24, p. v; Kaneko, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:406.

<sup>61</sup> AEB, p. v; Kaneko, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:406-407;

The combination of Kenney's methods and Japanese problems eliminated the air threat from Hollandia--Nimitz could bring in the carriers.

While Kenney's attacks on Hollandia may have tipped off the actual invasion site, the Japanese were also subjected to a clever, thoroughly thought through deception plan that completely fooled them. A key component in this deception was the heavy air strikes by Kenney's bombers on Wewak and Hansa Bay--the usual precursor for a MacArthur attack.<sup>62</sup> In addition to dropping bombs on ground positions and performing aerial reconnaissance, the airmen also parachuted dummies to the ground. While the aerial efforts helped convince the Japanese that they had guessed right, signals intelligence assured MacArthur and his commanders that their ruse was holding.<sup>63</sup>

Although Kenney's aviators focused on Hollandia at the end of March, they also continued to carry out other missions. Attacks on shipping were still a high priority in an effort to isolate the forces at Hollandia and Hansa Bay from any reinforcements, and ULTRA intelligence continued to pinpoint when and where the convoys were sailing.<sup>64</sup> Kenney's aircraft were augmented by the arrival of radar-equipped B-24s. Called LABs or "Snoopers," these airplanes prowled the coast of New Guinea at night, a period which had previously provided some protection from the

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<sup>62</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:263.

<sup>63</sup> Willoughby, pp. 180-182; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 116-118; March 30, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 384.

<sup>64</sup> Drea, "Leap," p. 331-332.

bombers, using their radars to find and bomb Japanese barges.<sup>65</sup> Kenney also had Whitehead begin hitting supply areas and troop concentrations around Hollandia to reduce any possible opposition to the amphibious invasion.<sup>66</sup> Although the Japanese air threat had been reduced by the attacks on Hollandia, Kenney's flyers continued to lose airplanes and crews to their worst enemy--the weather. Sunday April 16, 1944, earned the nickname "Black Sunday" from the losses inflicted that day by bad weather. In preparation for the invasion of Hollandia on April 22, Fifth Air Force sent a large strike against Tadjil on April 16. About 130 bombers and 40 fighters hit their assigned targets, but ran into low clouds on their way home and could not make it back to their home bases in the Markham Valley. Some crews made it into alternate landing sites, in other aircraft pilots got disoriented flying in the clouds and crashed, and some crews ran out of gas and made forced landings in the jungle or at sea. In all 32 crewmen and 31 aircraft were lost: almost 20 percent of the strike force.<sup>67</sup> As in any operation, some units were hit harder than others. The 433rd Fighter Squadron, flying P-38s, lost five aircraft and three pilots, while the other two squadrons in the same group lost the remaining three aircraft and pilots.<sup>68</sup> Kenney called it "the worst blow I took in

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<sup>65</sup> Kenney diary, May 8, 1943, KP; Crabb, pp. 32-33.

<sup>66</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 375, 386-387.

<sup>67</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 388. The losses vary depending on the source, AEB 24, pp. 84-85, lists 29 aircraft lost and 55 aircrew members missing or dead; Craven and Cate, 4:597, 53 aircrew missing or dead; Hewitt, p. 237 has the same figures as Kenney; Alcorn, Jolly Rogers, pp. 128-129, lists 26 aircraft and 32 crewmen lost; Yoshino, p. 69, 29 aircraft and 53 aircrew missing or dead. All agree it was a grim episode.

<sup>68</sup> Yoshino, pp. 68-69.

the whole war."<sup>69</sup> Although the weather report had been bad, there was no indication that it would cause as many problems as it did that day. Kenney, bothered by the number of missing aircraft and concerned about the impact it would have on morale, immediately flew to Nadzab to investigate the situation and find out what went wrong. Although he was able to stop operations for one day to search for the missing crews, he could not afford to do much more than that because of the upcoming invasions at Hollandia and Aitape.<sup>70</sup>

On the morning of April 22, 1944, one regiment of the 41st Division landed at Aitape to take control of the airfield at Tadjil while the rest of the division landed at Humboldt Bay, and the 24th Division went ashore at Tanahmerah Bay. The plan had completely fooled the Japanese and there was no significant opposition at any of the landing sites.<sup>71</sup> One group of participants stated that the amphibious landings "clicked probably better than any previous operation."<sup>72</sup>

The Persecution task force at Aitape landed at 6:45 in the morning, about a mile east of the intended landing site, a fortuitous error, as it turned out, because the new beach proved to be better than the one chosen by the planners. The ground forces advanced quickly inland to the airfields and discovered that the surprise attack had

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<sup>69</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 388.

<sup>70</sup> AEB 24, p. 84.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, Approach, p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> Put 'em Across: A History of the Second Engineer Special Brigade (Harrisburg, Penn.: Telegraph Press, 1946; reprinted, Washington, D. C.: Office of History, Corps of Engineers, 1988), p. 76.



caught some of the Japanese still asleep!<sup>73</sup> The air task force that accompanied the Persecution Task Force was headed by Air Commodore Scherger of the Australian Air Force, the first time an Australian officer had been appointed as the air task force commander.<sup>74</sup> Scherger, the commander of the RAAF Number 10 Operation Group an organization roughly equivalent to Kenney's air task forces, had numerous operational and staff assignments, including a stint at the Allied Air Forces headquarters and was well-regarded for his ability to get along well with American officers.<sup>75</sup> Scherger's primary task was to get the airfield ready in two days, so that fighters could move in when the escort carriers moved westward to cover the main landings at Hollandia. Construction of the airfields was the responsibility of Wing Commander W.A.C. Dale, the task force engineer and the commander of RAAF Number 62 Works Wing in the task force. In addition to his own engineering unit, Dale would also have the use of three American airborne engineer aviation battalions. By early afternoon both of the airstrips had been captured and the engineers had started their repairs.<sup>76</sup>

When the engineers began to survey the northern-most field (also called the fighter strip), they found the surface was not paved coral but sod. In addition, the field

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<sup>73</sup> Smith, Approach, p. 105.

<sup>74</sup> RAAF War History Section, "Precis of Activities of RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons in New Guinea and Borneo Campaigns," 1947, COE X-75-16.

<sup>75</sup> Harry Rayner, Scherger (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1984), pp. 60-63, 69-76; Alan Stephens, "RAAF Operational Commanders," in RAAF in the Southwest Pacific, pp. 36-29; Odgers, p. 206.

<sup>76</sup> RAAF, "Precis;" Engineers, 6:237-238; Smith, Approach, p. 108.

was shorter than predicted.<sup>77</sup> By the middle of the afternoon the engineers had begun grading and extending the air strip and the lack of Japanese opposition, both on the ground and in the air, allowed them to set up floodlights and continue working all night.<sup>78</sup> Dale declared the field open early in the morning of April 24, 41 hours after the engineers had started working. The first fighters, American P-38s, one flown by Brigadier General Paul Wurtsmith who commanded Fifth Fighter Command, landed at 9:45 and by the end of the day a squadron of RAAF P-40s was on duty.<sup>79</sup> Although heavy rains on April 25 rendered the runway unusable, and engineers were forced to shut down the runway for three days while they laid steel mat, by April 28 the field was open for good.<sup>80</sup>

The unopposed landings at Aitape were repeated further west as the 24th and 41st Divisions went ashore at Humboldt Bay and Tanahmerah Bay near Hollandia. The deception efforts had convinced the Japanese that the invasion would occur at Hansa Bay and they had no indication that the Allies would land somewhere else until the morning of April 22. There was no air opposition either; Kenney's attacks had forced the Japanese to abandon Hollandia. Large numbers of aircraft were later found on the ground at the three airfields and those that were flyable had fled for airfields further west.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> RAAF, "Precis."

<sup>78</sup> Smith, Approach, pp. 108-109.

<sup>79</sup> RAAF, "Precis;" Kenney, Reports, pp. 391-392.

<sup>80</sup> Engineers, p. 238.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, Approach, pp. 53-55, 68-69.

The biggest snag in the initial assault came from the conditions the troops found upon landing at Tanahmerah Bay. Kenney and Whitehead were involved in all phases of planning for operations and were concerned by the conditions at the landing beaches at Tanahmerah Bay. Whitehead told Kenney that, as he interpreted the reconnaissance photographs, the landing beach was small and the ground behind the beach rose sharply, making it difficult for a division-sized force to unload its supplies and quickly move them away from the landing area.<sup>82</sup> Kenney agreed with Whitehead's assessment and suggested landing a smaller force or ignoring the Tanahmerah Bay landing site altogether.<sup>83</sup>

Kenney reiterated his concerns about the landing beach, as well as his thoughts on the plan presented by the Navy for air support, at a meeting with all of the top level commanders on April 9. Perhaps because Kenney's forces were not going to be a significant factor in the actual invasion, which meant that he had not had much of a role in the meeting, he voiced numerous complaints. Kenney did not think that the Navy had allocated enough aircraft to cover the landing. Since they planned to support the landings with a heavy dose of naval gunfire, they argued that not as many aircraft would be needed, a position Kenney thought fundamentally wrong, and one he continued to argue, but was unable to change. He was forced to admit that his remarks

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<sup>82</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, Subject: Hollandia Operation, April 6, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>83</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 385. Kenney largely ignored Whitehead's role in this recommendation. Craven and Cate, 4:610. Admiral Barbey had similar concerns, Palo E. Coletta, "Daniel E. Barbey: Amphibious Warfare Expert," in Leary, p. 226.

"did not seem to make any impression."<sup>84</sup> Kenney also brought up the fact that the low altitude photographs showed that the landing conditions at Tanahmerah Bay would be "extremely difficult."<sup>85</sup> At the very least he thought the main effort should be shifted to Humboldt Bay. He even urged MacArthur to hold back the forces and land them further west, at Wakde and Sarmi, which would speed up the advance even more, but was told that it was too late to change the plan. Kenney blasted the ground commanders for their lack of flexibility, especially given the new information, but could not budge them.<sup>86</sup>

Although Kenney's concerns about the beach at Tanahmerah were ignored, in the end his forecast turned out to be correct. The main landing beach at Tanahmerah Bay, called Red 2 beach, was shallow and bordered on "a swamp armpit deep and extending inland from 100 to 200 yards."<sup>87</sup> Based on a variety of recommendations about the crowded conditions on the beach and the poor terrain, Eichelberger decided that follow-on landings would be made at Humboldt Bay and shifted the main effort to that area.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Kenney diary, April 9, 1944, KP.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Kenney diary, April 9, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, April 9, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA; Kenney, Reports, p. 385; Morison, 8:75.

<sup>87</sup> Put 'em Across, p. 76.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, Approach, p. 47; Put 'em Across, p. 79. Smith, Approach, p. 55 stated that the bad situation on the beach was "contrary to estimates." That is incorrect, there was good evidence that the beaches were bad, but Krueger made the decision not to change the plan. Morison, 8:75; Coletta, p. 226.

Fortunately, actual resistance to the invasion was slight and the ground forces made their way inland rapidly. The main objectives for the landings, the three airfields on the Lake Sentani plain, were controlled by the American forces just four days after the invasion and construction on the fields began almost immediately.<sup>89</sup> The carrier task force on loan from Admiral Nimitz departed on April 24 and the escort carriers moved from Aitape down to Hollandia.<sup>90</sup> Almost as soon as the engineers started working on the airfields it became apparent that they would not be able to repair the airfields as quickly as promised. A turn of events that surprised neither Kenney nor Whitehead. Whitehead, who as the on-scene commander in New Guinea had had more experience overseeing the building of the airfields, was concerned about having the airfields operating in three weeks from the time MacArthur announced the scheme to go to Hollandia.<sup>91</sup> As the operation approached, he told Kenney, "the more information we get on this general area, the less satisfactory it appears."<sup>92</sup>

Although engineers had plenty of aerial photographs to assist them in planning for the airfields at Hollandia, they did not have the benefit of a ground reconnaissance. Two weeks prior to the invasion, several reconnaissance teams had been put ashore, but soon after landing local inhabitants tipped off the Japanese who captured or killed

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, Approach, pp. 67, 76; Engineers, 6:225.

<sup>90</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:599.

<sup>91</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney. Subject: By-Passing Hansa Bay-Wewak-Tadji Areas, March 7, 1944, p. 2, file 730.161-3 HRA; Ennis C. Whitehead, "GHQ Modified Plan 'D'," March 7, 1944, Whitehead papers; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 9, 1944, pp. 1-2, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, March 12, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, April 6, 1944, Subject: Hollandia Operation, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>92</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, April 9, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

many of the soldiers while those that remained alive hid in the jungle to avoid capture, unable to make any reports.<sup>93</sup> Forced to rely on the aerial photographs, engineers focused on areas that the Japanese had already cleared and were using for their aircraft. The Japanese had built three airfields in the Hollandia area just north of Sentani Lake. Hollandia airfield had two runways, one 4500 feet long the other 6000 feet long, but capable of being lengthened to 8,000 feet.<sup>94</sup> According to the engineers, the soil at Hollandia was "moderately porous clayey silt," one of the worst foundations for building airfields because it would require about two feet of firmer fill material, such as gravel, to support the heavier aircraft.<sup>95</sup> Two miles southeast of the Hollandia air strip was Sentani, built for Japanese bombers and 5,800 feet long, and Cyclops, a fighter airfield 3,700 feet long. In addition to these three main airfields there was a small strip near Humboldt Bay called Tami which, even from the photographs, did not look like a good location.<sup>96</sup> Although there were no quarries nearby or large amounts of gravel, engineers concluded that the area contained good roads, plenty of water, and suitable materials for construction. They anticipated no problems making Hollandia into a large forward base which was slated to hold, among other things, ten bomber groups and eight fighter groups on six airfields, a large air repair depot, 4 million

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<sup>93</sup> Smith, Approach, p. 49.

<sup>94</sup> Engineer Intelligence Section, Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, "Humboldt Bay-Hollandia-Tanahmerah Bay Areas," p. 6, March 5, 1944, file 706.6101-61A; Allied Geographical Section, Southwest Pacific Area, "Locality Study of Hollandia," Terrain Study Number 78, p. 23, March 6, 1944, in Eichelberger Papers.

<sup>95</sup> Engineer Intelligence Section, Office of the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, "Engineer Annex 78A to Allied Geographical Section Terrain Study Number 78," p. 6, April 6, 1944, MMMA RG 4; Sturgis, "Air Power," p. 417.

<sup>96</sup> Allied Geographical Section "Locality Study of Hollandia," p. 23

square feet of covered storage, enough supplies to feed and arm 200,000 soldiers for six months, and six hospitals.<sup>97</sup> Appropriately, the 25,000 engineers, among them 7,500 aviation engineers, on the ships sailing towards Hollandia made up forty percent of the invasion force.<sup>98</sup>

One study of the engineers in the southwest Pacific stated that Hollandia was the first operation with "detailed" engineering plans, it does not appear that this prior preparation was of much help in carrying out the operation.<sup>99</sup> All of the airfields turned out to be too short for the Allied requirements, none of the runways had adequate drainage, and the soil was not firm enough.<sup>100</sup> The fighter strip at Cyclops was opened on April 27, five days after the landing for transport aircraft, and a squadron of P-40s moved into the field on May 3 to relieve the escort carriers off the coast.<sup>101</sup> The runway at Hollandia had 5000 feet available on May 3, but had to be surfaced with limestone before it was capable of allowing takeoffs and landings in any kind of weather. Heavy rainfall hampered all of the construction efforts and despite the "complete cooperation" of the engineers, Hollandia airfield was not in steady

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-44; Engineer Intelligence Section, "Humboldt Bay-Hollandia-Tanahmerah Bay Areas," pp. 7-8; Headquarters Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, Operations Instructions Number 49, in AEB 24; Dod, p. 527.

<sup>98</sup> Baldwin, p. 76.

<sup>99</sup> Engineers, 6:226.

<sup>100</sup> Dod, pp. 532, 549-550.

<sup>101</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:607; Engineers, 6:230.

operation until late May.<sup>102</sup> In short, building the airfields turned out to be much tougher than expected. Six weeks after the invasion Whitehead reported that the strip at Hollandia was only a "semi-all weather" landing surface and that there was still no runway capable of handling heavy bombers.<sup>103</sup> The construction problems, and the speed of subsequent operations, made it clear that the area would never be made into the massive advance location that the planners had forecast.<sup>104</sup>

The problems in developing the airfields were caused by a variety of factors. MacArthur's chief engineer, Major General Hugh Casey, was convinced that the engineers doing the work deserved much of the blame. The fields did consist of a sandy-clay as the terrain intelligence had predicted, but they were covered by six to eight inches of soft topsoil. This top layer of soil should have been removed prior to beginning work on the runways, but, in the haste to get the airfields done, was not.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the engineers in the invasion force did not pay enough attention to making preparations for drainage. As a result, when it rained in Hollandia, which it did quite frequently during this time of the year, water stayed on the runways rather than being carried away, making the subsoil very unstable and incapable of carrying heavy loads. The situation in Hollandia prompted Casey to write a memorandum to all engineers

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<sup>102</sup> Message, Commander Bomb Wing 310 to Commander Advon 5, May 16, 1944, in Eichelberger Papers; Engineers, 6: 230.

<sup>103</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, June 8, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA.

<sup>104</sup> Dod, p. 534.

<sup>105</sup> Engineers, 6:232.



stressing the importance of drainage in which he pointed out that it was impossible to build runways "on a bed of muck."<sup>106</sup>

Construction efforts were also hampered by problems in getting the heavy machinery to the airfields. The roads leading from the landing areas to the airfield complex turned out to be little more than a small dirt tracks. The heavy traffic over these paths during the first few days, especially on the road from Humboldt Bay, coupled with heavy rains made them impassable. None of the heavy engineer equipment was able to move over the roads and the work on the Cyclops field was done with light tools and captured Japanese equipment. The road situation also left the troops inland short of supplies and required pulling engineers off of the airfields and assigning them to fixing roads.<sup>107</sup> The supply situation was so desperate that bombers had to be pressed into service dropping food and supplies. Although the airfield at Tami near Humboldt Bay was not a good location for an airfield, Eichelberger, the task force commander, ordered the 1879th Aviation Engineer Battalion to the field to make repairs.<sup>108</sup> Eichelberger's plan was to have transports fly into Tami, load them with the supplies currently being dumped on the beachhead, and fly the food and ammunition to the forces inland.<sup>109</sup> The muddy roads also created problems in

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<sup>106</sup> Office of the Chief Engineers, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, Special Technical Memorandum Number 1, "Drainage," June 7, 1944, COE S,112, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Ruthless Task Force, "History of the Hollandia Operation," p. 19, July 1944, Eichelberger Papers; Engineers, p. 230.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, Approach, p. 67; Craven and Cate, 4:607, 609; Lowell W. Newton, "Jungle Airfields," Air Power History 42 (Fall 1995): 20.

<sup>109</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:609; Newton, p. 20.

establishing the early warning network as no radars or their associated equipment could move. Fortunately, the Japanese did not take advantage of Kenney's relative weakness in Hollandia: they only attempted six raids in twelve days and many of those were done by single aircraft at night, annoying to be sure, and sometimes dangerous, but not enough to cause any severe problems.<sup>110</sup>

From almost every aspect involved with carrying out a military operation, the invasion of Hollandia was a complete success. The planning between Kenney and the naval air commanders seemed to be detailed and well-thought out.<sup>111</sup> The procedures for geographical separation of the various air components, assisted by the exchange of liaison officers, worked out well and there were no complaints afterwards about the lack of coordination or support. But how well this system would have worked under the stress of heavy enemy air attacks was anyone's guess. The planning sessions, and the knowledge that future invasions might involve aircraft carriers, did prompt the development of standard operating procedures between carrier and land-based aircraft during an amphibious landing.<sup>112</sup> Despite Kenney's trepidation, using the carriers did not bring any adverse consequences. In short, the operation was a well-planned, well-executed example of air, sea, and land warfare supported by highly accurate intelligence estimates and little enemy reaction.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:608.

<sup>111</sup> Barbey, p. 161.

<sup>112</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, Standing Operating Procedures Instructions Number 12 "Cooperative Action of Land-Based and Carrier-Based Aircraft in Support of Landing Operations," May 9, 1944, file 706.204 HRA.

<sup>113</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 121-122.

When judged against the primary objective of landing, which was building a "major air base, minor naval facilities, and an intermediate supply base, for the purpose of supporting further operations,"<sup>114</sup> the operation was a bust. Problems in airfield and road construction made it impossible to fulfill the plans envisioned for the area. The problems in the Hollandia area can be partially explained by the poor decisions on drainage made by the engineers on the spot. In addition, incomplete information on the terrain led to very optimistic engineering estimates. Both Kenney and Whitehead were concerned about the terrain, but their counsel was ignored. Even with only some idea of the terrain around Hollandia, however, the two years of fighting in the jungle of New Guinea should have convinced any engineer that the estimates about the ability of the trails to handle the heavy equipment from the landing sites to the airfields was ludicrous. Few, if any, of the "trails" in New Guinea had ever been speedily converted into roads capable of handling heavy equipment, and enough Japanese airfields had been captured previously to give the planners some idea of their construction techniques.<sup>115</sup> In short, the engineering plans were too optimistic about both the speed with which the construction could be done and the extent of the work required.

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<sup>114</sup> "Operations Instructions Number 46."

<sup>115</sup> None of the reports written after this operation give any indication that this contingency should have been foreseen. See for examples, "History of the Hollandia Operation;" Reckless Task Force (I Corps), "Report of the Engineer Hollandia Operation April 22-August 25, 1944," COE X,95, 3.

## Sarmi-Wakde-Biak

Even before the problems with the airfields at Hollandia became clear, Kenney was lobbying MacArthur to speed up attacks further west. The move to Hollandia effectively removed most of his aircraft from the war and he now faced the embarrassing problem of having plenty of aircraft, but no way of using them.<sup>116</sup> ULTRA intelligence revealed that the Japanese were rushing air reinforcements into the area and without new airfields, Kenney would be unable to stop any Japanese air attacks.<sup>117</sup> Kenney was particularly interested in grabbing several small islands off the northern coast of New Guinea which presented fewer problems in building runways for bombers because the coral foundations were strong enough to support the heavier aircraft with little additional work. Kenney estimated that in those areas the engineers could have a runway ready in a "few days" rather than weeks or even months.<sup>118</sup> Kenney first pitched his idea of seizing the island of Wakde, 140 miles northwest of Hollandia, and the adjacent area of Sarmi in New Guinea at one of the final planning conferences for the Hollandia attack.<sup>119</sup> Kenney brought up the idea again at a meeting in Port Moresby on April 25, during which MacArthur approved the plan and scheduled the invasion for May 15.<sup>120</sup> A few days later, when the problems at

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<sup>116</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 394, 404.

<sup>117</sup> Captain Komoto H., Staff 23rd Air Flotilla, Imperial Japanese Navy in Interrogation of Japanese Officials, II:287-288; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 126.

<sup>118</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 395.

<sup>119</sup> Kenney diary, April 9, 1944, KP; Letter Allied Air Forces Southwest Pacific Area to General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area, April 12, 1944, cited in Smith, Approach, p. 208.

<sup>120</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 395.

Hollandia were becoming clear, Kenney went back to MacArthur and pressed him to bypass the landing on New Guinea for an attack on Biak, an island 325 miles west of Hollandia. Photographs showed that the terrain around Sarmi, like that at Hollandia, would not support heavy bombers and this time the recommendation was heeded.<sup>121</sup> Kenney needed the fields at Wakde and Biak not only to speed MacArthur's advance to the Philippines and beat down the burgeoning Japanese air strength in western New Guinea, but also to attack Japanese air bases in the Caroline Islands in support of Nimitz's Central Pacific advance.<sup>122</sup>

The landings at Wakde, Sarmi, and Biak reverted to the familiar pattern of earlier New Guinea operations without the support of aircraft carriers. Kenney gained control of the air, then isolated the landing zone, destroyed the shore defenses, and proved direct support during the invasion itself until the airfield was secure. At the same time his aircraft continued to fly reconnaissance missions, support ground operations in the bypassed areas, and transport troops and supplies.<sup>123</sup> Kenney assigned Fifth Air Force the task of directly supporting the attack for the invasion of Wakde, while the Thirteenth Air Task Force had the primary responsibility for bombing the airfields in the Caroline Islands in support of Admiral Nimitz's operations as well as patrolling the seas and attacking targets in eastern New Guinea and New Britain. RAAF Command remained committed to the area in New Guinea west of

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<sup>121</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:620.

<sup>122</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 395; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 128; Smith, Approach, pp. 206-208; James, Years, 2:459.

<sup>123</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 397; "The Sarmi-Wakde-Biak Operation," May-June 1944, KP

Noemfoor Island and installations in the Timor and Arafura Sea areas in an attempt to keep some of the air reinforcements away from the ground operations.<sup>124</sup> After the ground forces gained control over the airfield, engineers moved in to make repairs for aircraft to land and start the cycle anew on the next objective.

The attacks on Wakde and Sarimi went off as scheduled in late May. Although the Japanese had guessed the trajectory of MacArthur's advance, the speed with which he moved surprised them and made it difficult to assemble enough forces for a strong defense. In addition, they continued to be handicapped by their lack of heavy equipment which made it difficult to build enough airfields even when combat forces were drafted as construction workers.<sup>125</sup> The Japanese on Wakde fought hard, but had a limited number of soldiers to defend the island. The airfield was initially captured on May 18, and repairs began the next day. By May 21 the field was ready for aircraft, although many of the dispersal areas were not completed for another week.<sup>126</sup>

The landing on Biak early in the morning of May 27 likewise went smoothly; capturing the airfields however, turned into a long and bloody affair. The position of Biak, only 900 miles south of Mindanao, made it a critical point in the crumbling Japanese defensive perimeter and they were determined to protect it for as long as possible. The Japanese commander on the island correctly assumed that the primary

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<sup>124</sup> "The Sarimi-Wakde-Biak Operation;" Smith, Approach, pp. 214-215; Craven and Cate, 4:623-624.

<sup>125</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:276-277

<sup>126</sup> "The Sarimi-Wakde-Biak Operation;" Reports of MacArthur, 2:279-280; Craven and Cate, 4:628-629; Smith, p. 231.

objective of an invasion would be the only possible site for an airfield, and the current location of several Japanese runways, a small strip of land along the southern coast of the island. Overlooking this area was a series of 500 foot high limestone cliffs that were riddled with caves--a perfect location for a defensive stand.<sup>127</sup> Once again MacArthur's advance hit sooner than expected and many of the Japanese defensive preparations were incomplete, perhaps the most important being that the garrison had not been reinforced with troops earmarked for that purpose from the 35th Division.<sup>128</sup> Despite being short of troops, the Japanese put up a stout defense. The almost impregnable positions in the cliffs overlooking the Mokmer airfield made it impossible to get control of the area. Although the area was in American hands by June 8, the Japanese continued to lob artillery shells and mortars onto the runways making it impossible for the engineers to repair the airfields. Even after a portion of the runway was repaired, the Japanese shelling kept the runway closed.<sup>129</sup>

While the ground forces carried on their grim struggle to capture the airfields, radio intercept operators monitored Japanese activities far from the island. The invasion of Wakde and Biak threatened to topple the Japanese defensive perimeter and triggered a series of moves by military commanders to retain control over the area. About 100 Japanese naval aircraft were flown from bases in the Philippines and Central Pacific to the western region of New Guinea. Beginning on June 1 the Japanese made

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<sup>127</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:283; Smith, Approach, pp. 300-302.

<sup>128</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:283, 285.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, Approach, pp. 325, 336, 340.

several raids, but because none of the attacks was in great strength, Kenney's fighters managed to defeat the bombing raids and Allied bombers hit the Japanese airfields to destroy the aircraft on the ground.<sup>130</sup> The Japanese shifted to night attacks on Wakde with better results. Because of problems in developing the airfields at Hollandia, Wakde was the only forward location available to Kenney for heavy bombers. Despite the efforts of the engineers they were not able to build dispersal areas around the island and, much like the situation the Japanese faced, Wakde was packed with aircraft. Despite the presence of a night fighter squadron, a ground radar station, and a Wireless Unit from the RAAF, several of the night raids hit their mark, destroying at least thirteen aircraft while damaging many others in two nights.<sup>131</sup>

From Kenney's earliest days in command an increase in Japanese air activity had been a tip off that a convoy was in the offing. The situation during the battle for Biak was no different. On May 29 the Japanese army and navy staffs agreed on reinforcing Biak and set in motion plans for transporting the 2d Amphibious Brigade from Mindanao to Biak. The convoy, called the KON convoy, consisted of a transport group of two cruisers and three destroyers, and a screening group of two cruisers, five destroyers, and a battleship, departed Davao in Mindanao on June 2.<sup>132</sup> Intercepted radio messages alerted Kenney, and other allied commanders, to the convoy's

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<sup>130</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 402; Reports of MacArthur, 2:287; Smith, pp. 349-350; Morison, 8:118-119, 122.

<sup>131</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 404; Craven and Cate, 4:629-630, 638; Bleakley, pp. 152-154; Morison, 8:125.

<sup>132</sup> Captain Momochio Shimanouchi, Imperial Japanese Navy, November 26, 1945 in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:450, 452; Reports of MacArthur, 2:288-289.



departure for Biak, and air and naval forces rushed to the area to cut it off.<sup>133</sup> On the night of June 3 the Japanese withdrew much of the screening group after receiving reports that a American carrier task force was moving towards Biak (which was not true) and that the convoy was being followed by American submarines and B-24 "Snoopers" (which was true). The transport group and three additional destroyers, however, did not return to the Philippines but continued south towards Sorong in western New Guinea.<sup>134</sup>

After a refueling stop, the convoy departed Sorong for Biak at midnight on June 8 with six destroyers each loaded with 200 soldiers. Radio intercepts and reconnaissance reports helped track the convoy, but the bombing of Wakde retarded Kenney's efforts to hit the convoy.<sup>135</sup> The only long-range aircraft available were B-25s from the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron. They spotted the convoy and attacked it on June 8 at 1245 just 200 miles from Biak. The ten B-25s radioed their report and then bore in at wave-top height to attack the warships. This attack would not be a repeat of the Bismarck Sea, there were too few of Kenney's attackers and the destroyers were more heavily armed than the Japanese merchant shipping. Three of the B-25s were hit and crashed almost immediately, killing all aboard, while the returning seven aircraft were so badly damaged that the squadron had to be removed from combat. In return they sank the destroyer Harusame and inflicted some minor

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<sup>133</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 138-139.

<sup>134</sup> Shimanouchi, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:452; Reports of MacArthur, 2:289; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 139-140.

<sup>135</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:638; James, Years, 2:461-462; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 140.

damage on the other ships.<sup>136</sup> After rescuing the survivors of the Harusame, the convoy continued to Biak and arrived near the northern coast of the island that night. One of the destroyers sighted an Allied naval task force under the command of Admiral Kinkaid and the Japanese retired after discharging about 100 troops.<sup>137</sup> Further attempts to reinforce Biak ended when the Japanese received word that Central Pacific forces under Admiral Nimitz were attacking Japanese bases in the Marianas. The shelling and air attacks of Tinian and Saipan beginning on June 11 meant that these islands would be the site of the next American attack and most of the Japanese naval surface forces were dispatched to contest the landing on Saipan, marking an end to any efforts to reinforce Biak.<sup>138</sup>

The Japanese attempt to reinforce Biak was a close-run affair and Kenney's forces had been unable to stop it. Despite the overwhelming American air and sea superiority, the Japanese were able to send about 1000 troops to the island by various means.<sup>139</sup> Some of the problems Kenney faced were beyond his control. The lack of airfields limited the possible number of aircraft that could be used, and Japanese attacks had reduced this number even further. Perhaps to compensate for this rather ineffectual showing, Kenney's version of the destruction of the convoy was

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<sup>136</sup> Shimanouchi, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:452; Commander Chihaya Masataka, Staff 4th Advanced Southern Fleet, Imperial Japanese Navy, October 29, 1945, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 1:201; Komoto, 2:289; Craven and Cate, 4:638.

<sup>137</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:291; Craven and Cate, 4:639; Morison, 8:123-124. Smith, Approach, pp. 354-358, states that the destroyers were towing barges and that those accounted for the 100 troops landed. The Japanese sources do not mention the barges.

<sup>138</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2: 291-292; Smith, Approach, pp. 358-359.

<sup>139</sup> Morison, 8:132.

substantially different and greatly exaggerated the impact of air power during the operation. Kenney recorded that ten B-24s attacked the convoy on June 4, sinking two destroyers and damaging two cruisers. A Japanese officer in the convoy told investigators after the war that although the ships were attacked they did not suffer any losses.<sup>140</sup> Kenney also stated that his forces made two attacks on June 6 in which several destroyers and cruisers received direct hits. The Japanese reported one ship being "heavily attacked," but it was not damaged.<sup>141</sup> Notwithstanding the brave and courageous efforts of the B-25s which attacked the convoy on June 8, Kenney's version of the attack was clearly wrong. In Kenney's account, probably based on the initial post-flight reconstructions by the crews, the B-25s sank four destroyers and damaged one other (while the actual results were one sunk, three damaged) and following the attack the remaining ships "made a 180 degree turn and went back home," an outcome Kenney might have hoped was true, but which events later that day that he surely knew about, made clear did not happen.<sup>142</sup> As he so often did, however, Kenney continued to believe the original version of the events and his published account makes no reference to the surface naval actions claiming, instead, that after the B-25 attack the ships that remained afloat "turned around and headed northwest at full speed."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 402; Shimanouchi, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:452.

<sup>141</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 402; Shimanouchi, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:452; Reports of MacArthur, 2:289.

<sup>142</sup> Message, Kenney to Army Air Forces headquarters, July 21, 1944, cited in "The Sarmi-Wakde-Biak Operation," May-June 1944, in KP.

<sup>143</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 403.

Although the Japanese attempts to send reinforcements to Biak had been stymied fighting on the island continued unabated. American forces maneuvered to split the Japanese defenses and eventually burned and blasted them out of the caves overlooking the airfield. The Japanese's last desperate attempt at recapturing the runways came on June 9, but the Japanese positions in caves overlooking the airfield slowed repair work and made it impossible to use the runway.<sup>144</sup> It took another week of bloody fighting to eliminate the Japanese positions enough to allow the engineers to finish their repairs, and P-40s were able to land on Biak and begin flying operations on June 23.<sup>145</sup>

The delay in establishing the runways on Biak did not slow down the pace of the war, however, and Kenney looked elsewhere for likely airfields. Owi island, just three miles south of Biak, had been overlooked in the advanced planning, but seemed a good bet: it was a coral island, could handle the weight of the heavy bombers, and was unoccupied.<sup>146</sup> With the delays on Biak, engineers scouted Owi in early June and on June 9 construction began on the first runway, by June 17 completing 4500 feet of runway, enough to allow ten P-38s and one B-25 to make emergency landings. By June 21 the airfield was complete and one fighter group of P-38s began flying operations.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:296; Smith, Approach, p. 340.

<sup>145</sup> Dod, p. 541; Smith, Approach, pp. 375, 393.

<sup>146</sup> Engineers, 6:250.

<sup>147</sup> Engineers, 6:250; Dod, pp. 539, 541; Smith, Approach, pp. 340-341.

In the meantime, planning for landings further westward and northward continued. The island of Noemfoor on the far western end of New Guinea was isolated by air action and quickly captured in early July, and about a month later, Allied forces captured the Sansapor region of New Guinea.<sup>148</sup> To keep down any Japanese air interference with the landings near Sansapor, Nimitz's carriers hit the Japanese air bases on Palau while Kenney's airmen attacked the airfields on the island group known as the Halmaheras. Once again, signals intelligence provided Kenney with a clear picture of the Japanese buildup. By Kenney's estimation there were about 200 aircraft in the Halmaheras at the end of July along with almost 800 in the Philippines. He could not understand why the Japanese were not using the aircraft to attack his airfields that were now packed with aircraft dangerously close together and concluded that their inaction was yet another example of their inability to understand air power.<sup>149</sup>

Kenney's airmen attacked airfields in the Halmaheras on July 27 and met with little resistance while destroying about 100 aircraft. The experience, according to Kenney, "left everyone contemptuous of the capabilities of the Nip air force,"<sup>150</sup> a conclusion which reveals more about Kenney's state of mind regarding the Japanese capabilities than it did about the unanimity of opinion within his command. The landing at Sansapor on July 30 met with little resistance and by the beginning of

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<sup>148</sup> Smith, Approach, pp. 397-448.

<sup>149</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 417; Ballard, p. 287.

<sup>150</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 417; Reports of MacArthur, 2:303. In this instance, Kenney's estimates of the number of aircraft destroyed are very close to the losses reported by the Japanese.

August it appeared that most of the Japanese aircraft had been destroyed or moved northward to the Philippines.<sup>151</sup>

During the series of westward invasions in New Guinea, Kenney's command underwent a significant organizational change. In absorbing the addition of air units from the Thirteenth Air Force from the South Pacific theater, Kenney could no longer remain the commander of Fifth Air Force. A new organizational headquarters was needed to encompass both organizations. Kenney, who now enjoyed MacArthur's greatest confidence, would remain in overall command of the two American air forces. MacArthur's initial suggestion for the name of Kenney's new headquarters was First Air Army, but his idea was rejected in Washington in favor of Far East Air Forces.<sup>152</sup> Kenney assumed command of the provisional headquarters of the Far East Air Forces on June 15, 1944 and the headquarters was given permanent status on August 5, 1944.<sup>153</sup> Whitehead took over as commander of Fifth Air Force and Major General St. Clair Street was named the head of Thirteenth Air Force.<sup>154</sup> Kenney retained his title as the commander of the Allied Air Forces and on June 15 was placed in charge of air units remaining in the Solomon Islands, including the First Marine Air Wing and the Royal New Zealand Air Force which were part of a command called Aircraft Northern Solomons under United States Marine Corps Major General Ralph J.

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<sup>151</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 420.

<sup>152</sup> Kenney diary, May 16, 1944, KP.

<sup>153</sup> Kenney diary, June 11, 1944, KP; Headquarters Far East Air Forces, General Order Number 1 and Number 4, June 15, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 4:648.

<sup>154</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, April 9, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA; May 5, 1944, KP.

Mitchell.<sup>155</sup> While these changes increased the number of aircraft available to Kenney, the change codified the existing organizational framework that had been worked out over the past two years in the Southwest Pacific. Kenney retained overall command of the air organizations and handed down the general priority of missions and the tasks for a given period of time. He then let the respective air force headquarters and air task forces do the detailed planning for missions.

After the invasion of Sansapor, the next stop for MacArthur's forces was the island of Morotai. With MacArthur's drive now drawing closer to the Philippines, the operations of the southwest Pacific worked more closely with Admiral Nimitz of the Central Pacific. The two commanders agreed to attack Morotai and the southern Palaus on September 15. This attack would be followed by an invasion of Yap Island on October 5, the Talaud Islands on October 15, then Mindanao in November, Leyte at the end of December, and Luzon in February 1945. MacArthur would soon make good on his promise to return to the Philippines.<sup>156</sup>

## Conclusion

Although Kenney preached the same plan for air operations in MacArthur's march westward through New Guinea, the leap to Hollandia brought with it carrier-based aircraft and introduced some new problems for Kenney's air plans. For sound practical reasons Kenney did not think it wise to rely on aircraft carriers for support of

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<sup>155</sup> Craven and Cate, 4:647; Charles W. Boggs, Jr., Marine Aviation in the Philippines (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1951), pp. 1-4.

<sup>156</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 420; Smith, Approach, p. 453; Barbey, pp. 217-228.

an amphibious landing. He believed that the carrier-based aircraft had important operating limitations and the ships themselves could only remain in an area for a few days, making it dangerous to rely on them for air support. Kenney's arguments made little headway with MacArthur who remained focused on returning to the Philippines and defeating Japan. In the event, the invasion of Hollandia went smoothly. Kenney had "rubbed out" any potential Japanese air threat and there was no attempt to reinforce the airfields during the attack. The leap to Hollandia also presented Kenney with the problem of building air bases in forward areas. He now had plenty of aircraft, but had difficulty moving them forward and into combat. Slowly, but surely, more airfields were being completed. With the campaigning in the western end of New Guinea complete, Kenney looked forward to MacArthur's move to the Philippines.



## **Chapter Nine**

### **Return to the Philippines, October to December 1944**

**"The main lesson . . . we should draw from this operation is to stick to land-based support"<sup>1</sup>**

MacArthur's long-awaited return to the Philippines received a boost just prior to the invasion of Morotai in the middle of September. Beginning in late August, Admiral Halsey conducted several raids against targets all over the Philippine archipelago and encountered little opposition from Japanese aircraft. Based on the lack of an effectual Japanese air reaction and a report from a carrier pilot who had been rescued by guerrilla forces, Halsey recommended canceling the planned invasion of Yap and moving up the invasion of Leyte. Nimitz agreed with Halsey's proposal and offered to turn over his carriers and the army corps scheduled to invade the island of Yap to MacArthur contingent on approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). While the JCS agreed in principle to Nimitz's suggestion, they asked MacArthur for his thoughts.<sup>2</sup> At the time, MacArthur was aboard a destroyer observing radio silence as it accompanied the task force to Morotai. Lieutenant General Richard Sutherland, MacArthur's long-serving chief of staff, received the message at MacArthur's new

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, p. 7, KP.

<sup>2</sup> Message, Joint Chiefs of Staff to MacArthur, September 13, 1944, Message, MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 14, 1944, RG4 MMMA; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, September 16, 1944, Whitehead papers; Hayes, p. 620; Craven and Cate, 5:306-307.

headquarters in Hollandia and initially responded to the Joint Chiefs and Nimitz that Halsey's report was wrong. But Sutherland did not reject Nimitz's proposal; instead, he temporized and told the Joint Chiefs that he needed more details about Halsey's attacks.<sup>3</sup> After receiving the added information, Sutherland seized the opportunity and told the Joints Chiefs of Staff that MacArthur would be ready to invade Leyte on October 20, 1944, a plan that was quickly approved.<sup>4</sup> Although Sutherland's recommendation followed Halsey's new report, it is unlikely the new information played much of a role in this decision. Intelligence provided by intercepting Japanese radio messages and guerrilla operations within the Philippines painted a more pessimistic picture of the Japanese forces, and Sutherland knew many of the Japanese aircraft had been withdrawn northward to the island of Luzon. Sutherland probably based his decision more on MacArthur's likely reaction if he returned and discovered that his staff had turned down an opportunity for his return to the Philippines. If Sutherland failed to grab this chance, it might have meant bypassing the Philippines altogether.<sup>5</sup>

Kenney had been thinking along similar lines of speeding up the advance to the Philippines. Although he later claimed credit for advocating the early invasion of Leyte, at the time his plans were more modest, he hoped to omit the invasion of Talaud for an assault on Mindanao. It is unlikely that Kenney would have come up with the

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<sup>3</sup> Message, MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 14, 1944, RG 4, MMMA.

<sup>4</sup> Message, MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 15, 1944; Message, Joint Chiefs of Staff to MacArthur, September 15, 1944; RG 4, MMMA; Hayes, pp. 620-621; Matloff, pp. 512-513.

<sup>5</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 158.

idea of going to Leyte on his own for the same reason he objected to the invasion of Hollandia--it would be beyond the range of his aircraft. As Sutherland responded to the change in operations proposed by the JCS, Kenney visited different bases and met with Whitehead at the new 5th Air Force headquarters on Owi to discuss Kenney's idea of omitting the Talaud operation.<sup>6</sup> Even Kenney's plan would have entailed some risk, and Whitehead worried about the impact of the Japanese aircraft if he could not move his forces forward. The feeble Japanese reaction to the air attacks on Halmaheras convinced Kenney that they would have little effect on operations despite a lack of intermediate bases and he brushed off Whitehead's concerns, telling him, "Jap air is shot."<sup>7</sup>

Kenney returned to his headquarters at Hollandia on September 15 and found out about the decision to invade Leyte in October. He told Whitehead, "the program that you and I talked over on shortening up the move into the Philippines is child's play compared with what has happened in the last couple of days."<sup>8</sup> Kenney played no part in the actual decision, although he would later exaggerate his role, but he wholeheartedly supported Sutherland's decision and promised to be when MacArthur returned.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kenney diary, September 13, 14, 15, 16, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 426-428, 431.

<sup>7</sup> Kenney diary, September 12, 1944, KP.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, September 16, 1944, p. 1, Whitehead papers.

<sup>9</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 432, for how he reconstructed his role in the decision. Kenney diary, September 14, 15, 16, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, September 16, 1944, p. 1, Whitehead papers; Headquarters Far East Air Forces, "Leyte," [1945?], p. 5, file 720.3069 HRA.

The decision to invade Leyte meant that MacArthur would once more rely on aircraft carriers and Kenney's land-based air power would play no direct role in the invasion. Kenney earlier had warned MacArthur, "I consider it unwise to rely on carrier units completely . . . for the Morotai, Sarangai, and Leyte operations."<sup>10</sup> The aircraft from carriers he argued, could only spend a short time over their targets, their range was limited, and their small bomb loads could not provide a sufficient preliminary bombardment prior to an amphibious attack.<sup>11</sup> After hearing about the decision to advance the attack on Leyte, Whitehead reminded Kenney of the shortcomings of aircraft carriers in an attempt to stop or modify the change in plans.<sup>12</sup>

Whitehead's warnings went unheeded. Although Kenney retained some uneasiness about relying on the aircraft carriers, his perceptions about the state of the Japanese forces in the Philippines overcame his fears. Based on the overall performance of the Japanese air units, especially what had been reported from the attacks in the Halmaheras, Kenney was convinced that the Japanese were "on the downhill grade"<sup>13</sup> and argued that "the war will officially end when we take the Philippines--perhaps by the time we land on Luzon."<sup>14</sup> Kenney believed that the advance to Leyte was possible because of the failure of the Japanese to understand air

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<sup>10</sup> Letter, Kenney to CinC Southwest Pacific Area, July 11, 1944, Subject: Application of the Reno V Plan, Phases I and II, file 730.161-3 HRA. Kenney voiced another complaint on August 16, 1944, KP.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Goldstein, "Aerospace Pioneer," pp. 205-208.

<sup>13</sup> Kenney diary, September 13, 1944, KP.

<sup>14</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, September 17, 1944, p. 4, file 706.311 HRA.

power. "I didn't think that his air leadership and staff work could be so bad," he told Arnold. "He has handled his air force like an amateur, frittering it away in a manner that is really disgraceful from a professional viewpoint."<sup>15</sup> Kenney also postulated that the Japanese had lost the few individuals capable of becoming pilots. "I failed to appreciate . . . the percentage of Japanese males that can be made into combat aviators is much smaller than ours." "Too much of their population," he continued, "is peasant class--rice planters, fishermen, richsa [sic] pullers--who are too dumb, too slow thinking and utterly lacking in mechanical knowledge or adaptability."<sup>16</sup> From his perspective, the threat from Japanese aircraft had largely disappeared:

The newcomers to the game are incapable of even flying their equipment, much less become real flyers. In common with most of their race they become confused when faced with an unforeseen emergency. Japan hasn't the years of time required to teach this class of plodding, thick-headed, half fed, stupid recruits how to fight against the well drilled show we have out here. It takes intelligence to fight in the air. We have it. The Jap had quite a bit a year ago. He does not have it now.<sup>17</sup>

His confidence in Japanese weakness led Kenney to think that Halsey's carriers might not be needed for the invasion at all. He anticipated that the American fleet could be released the day after the amphibious landing "to seek out and destroy the Jap fleet or anything else worth hitting."<sup>18</sup> While he conceded that the invasion of Leyte was something of a "gamble," the weakness of the Japanese made him confident that the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Kenney diary, September 22, 1944, KP.

gamble was worth taking. "If my hunch is right, that the Japs are about through, we are all right," he told Whitehead, but if they were able to cobble together some resistance on Leyte, especially in the air, "we are in for a lot of trouble"--prophetic words for the battle of Leyte Gulf.<sup>19</sup>

### **Balikpapan**

During the intervening month between the decision to invade Leyte in mid-September and the actual attack on October 20, 1944, commanders, staff officers, soldiers, sailors, and airmen hectically prepared for the largest amphibious invasion in the Pacific. While Kenney spent most of his time overseeing preparations for the invasion, he also ordered a series of air attacks on the oil refineries at Balikpapan in Borneo.

From the time he arrived in Australia in 1942, Kenney regarded the sources of Japanese oil as potential war-winning targets, but the closest refineries were over 1000 miles away, out of range for the bombers in Australia. According to Kenney, the most important area of Japanese oil production was the area around Palembang in southern Sumatra, while Balikpapan in eastern Borneo contained critical oil refineries. In a bit of Kenney overstatement, he argued that these targets constituted "the finest and most decisive set of targets for bombing anywhere in the world."<sup>20</sup> There was no way that

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<sup>19</sup> Letter, Kenney to Whitehead, September 16, 1944, p. 2, Whitehead Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 29, 1943, quoted in Stanley L. Falk, "General Kenney, The Indirect Approach, and the B-29s," Aerospace Historian 27 (Fall 1981):151.

any bombers Kenney had available could reach Palembang--it was simply too far away. Balikpapan, however, was barely within range and continued to draw Kenney's attention. Under Dutch control before the war, the refineries at Balikpapan were the second-largest refining center in southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup> Before leaving the area in January 1942 on the heels of the Japanese advance, Dutch technicians destroyed some of the equipment which hobbled Japanese efforts at extracting oil for a time. The Japanese were eventually able to refine about 2,500,000 barrels a year, the majority of it as aviation fuel.<sup>22</sup>

The closest Allied base to Balikpapan was at Darwin in northwestern Australia and B-24s based there made sporadic attempts to attack the oil targets. On the night of August 13, 1943, B-24s from the 380th Bombardment Group flew the 2400 mile, seventeen hour round trip mission to Balikpapan.<sup>23</sup> Aircrews on the mission reported both refinery areas burning and "at least 7 large oil tanks exploded."<sup>24</sup> Although two of the ten aircraft on the mission did not return and later photo reconnaissance showed that refineries were not destroyed, both Kenney and Whitehead thought that the raid worthwhile because it critically reduced Japanese oil supplies over the next ninety

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<sup>21</sup> Odgers, p. 480.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; Netherlands Military Oil Intelligence Service, "General Description of all Installations at Balikpapan," p. 4, September 20, 1944, file 730-306.5 HRA; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, April 1, 1944, KP; United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Oil in Japan's War (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 45-47, 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> Kenney diary, August 13, 1943, KP; Crabb, Section II, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Kenney diary, August 13, 1943, KP.

days.<sup>25</sup> The B-24s occasionally returned to Balikpapan, but only sporadically and only at night. The lack of long-range fighters that could escort the bombers that far and the robust Japanese air defenses in the area led Kenney to believe that a daylight raid would inflict prohibitively high losses.<sup>26</sup> The occasional raids and the possibility of future attacks, however, did tie up a portion of the Japanese fighter force in defending Balikpapan.<sup>27</sup>

The distance from Darwin to Balikpapan not only made it impossible to conduct bombing attacks in daylight, but also reduced the bomb loads that the B-24s could carry. Solving this problem required a bomber with longer range and accounts for Kenney's continuing interest in the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. The decision in March 1944 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff that approved MacArthur's bold move to Hollandia and sanctioned Admiral Nimitz's invasion of the Marianas, a move supported by Arnold in the hope of gaining air bases from which the B-29s could attack the Japanese home islands, effectively ended Kenney's quest for the new bomber.

During preparations for the Hollandia landing, Kenney received a visit from Major General Laurence Kuter, Arnold's assistant chief of staff in charge of planning. Like "Possum" Hansell who had visited Kenney earlier, Kuter was a fervent believer in the efficacy of strategic bombardment and determined not to waste the B-29s on

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<sup>25</sup> Crabb, Section 2, p. 8; Craven and Cate, 4:169-170, 722, fn. 26. Goldstein, "Aerospace Pioneer," pp. 286, fn. 47 states that the 37 percent of the bombers were lost, a figure that does not match other sources.

<sup>26</sup> Odgers, p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Komoto, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2:287.



anything less than winning the war through air power alone.<sup>28</sup> Kenney later referred to Kuter and Hansell, among others, as "the Young Turks,"<sup>29</sup> and believed they were the primary supporters behind the Navy's plan for the Marianas, a stance which pitted them against Kenney and MacArthur.<sup>30</sup> Kuter tried to explain the rationale behind the decisions about the B-29s, but Kenney continued his sales efforts, pointing out that missions from Darwin to Balikpapan would provide an opportunity to introduce the crews and airplanes into combat against a relatively benign group of targets.<sup>31</sup> Kenney also maintained that the most important oil target in the region was not Palembang, a conclusion Kuter disputed, but Balikpapan. Even if the B-29s could not be assigned to Kenney permanently, he continued to press for their use against Balikpapan, even offering to service the aircraft in Darwin if needed.<sup>32</sup> Despite Kenney's blandishments, Kuter was unimpressed. He told Arnold that Kenney's evidence on Balikpapan was not convincing and that Palembang remained the primary oil target in southeast Asia. More importantly, those two targets were the only "strategic objectives" within reach of Kenney's bases, making it clear that Kuter saw no reason for basing the B-29s in the southwest Pacific.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I. B. Holley, Jr., "An Air Force General: Laurence Sherman Kuter," Aerospace Historian 27 (June 1980):88-90; Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., "General Laurence S. Kuter 1905-1979," Aerospace Historian 27 (June 1980): 91-94.

<sup>29</sup> Kenney diary, February 19, 1945, KP.

<sup>30</sup> Kenney diary, March 28, 1944, KP.

<sup>31</sup> Message, Kuter to Arnold, April 2, 1944, KP.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, April 1, 1944, KP.

<sup>33</sup> Message, Kuter to Arnold, April 2, 1944.

Despite the setback in obtaining the long-range bombers, Kenney would not take no for an answer. In August 1944, he met with his old friend and Arnold's current chief of staff, Major General Barney Giles, and urged Giles to send four groups of B-29s to Darwin. Giles was apparently impressed by what he saw and heard and pressed Kenney's demand on Arnold, but the request was denied.<sup>34</sup> In early September 1944, Kenney began making serious preparations to attack the refineries at Balikpapan. These attacks, he hoped, would reduce the amount of aviation fuel in the Philippines and ground the Japanese aircraft, rendering them ineffective during the invasion. Kenney knew full well that effects of an attack on the oil refineries would not be felt for some time, at least a month or two. Since the original invasion date for Leyte was in late December, he planned to attack the oil targets in late September or early October. Once again he submitted a request for B-29s, but scaled his request back to two groups. Kenney claimed that the loss of Balikpapan "would throw a heavy burden on Japan."<sup>35</sup> In what by now must have been a familiar disappointment for Kenney, Arnold declined.<sup>36</sup>

Although Kenney requested the use of the B-29s from Arnold in September, he must have had little faith in actually getting the aircraft and began making his own plans in August for an October attack on the oil refineries. The October date would provide airfields close enough to Balikpapan for the B-24 bombers to carry a large

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<sup>34</sup> Kenney diary, August 7, 13, 1944. KP: Falk, p. 154; Craven and Cate, 7:284.

<sup>35</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, September 8, 1944, KP.

<sup>36</sup> Kenney diary, September 12, 1944, KP.

bomb load and allow enough time for the fuel shortages to reduce or stop air operations in the Philippines in time for the invasion of Leyte.<sup>37</sup> When the Leyte invasion was moved up to October 20, Whitehead wanted to cancel the operation, but Kenney refused.<sup>38</sup> His unwillingness to change was based on the fact that he not only conceived of the attack as a means of reducing the effectiveness of the Japanese air forces in the Philippines, but he also had a "hunch" that the combination of the loss of Balikpapan and the invasion of the Philippines would convince the decision-makers in Tokyo to end the war.<sup>39</sup>

Kenney regarded Whitehead's Fifth Air Force, his old command, as the elite air unit in his command and for that reason they were usually given the primary role in any invasion. Kenney must have been aware of his partiality and acceded to St. Clair Street's request that Thirteenth Air Force be allowed to plan and lead the raids on Balikpapan.<sup>40</sup> Kenney believed that doing so would give them some "prestige."<sup>41</sup> The biggest problem in planning for the missions remained the distance from the Allied air bases to Balikpapan. The closest airdrome capable of supporting the bombers was at Noemfoor, 1,080 nautical miles from the oil targets. In order to carry enough fuel for the mission and a 2,500 pound load of bombs, the amount considered necessary to

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<sup>37</sup> Kenney diary, September 12, 1944; Kenney, Reports, p. 426.

<sup>38</sup> Kenney diary, September 17, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 433.

<sup>39</sup> Kenney diary, September 14, 1944, KP.

<sup>40</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:316-317.

<sup>41</sup> Kenney diary, September 12, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 427.

inflict serious damage, the bombers could only carry 40 percent of their normal ammunition load, an indication of Kenney's belief in the relative weakness of the Japanese air force.<sup>42</sup> The distance to Balikpapan also presented some problems in providing a fighter escort. It would have been difficult, but possible, to send some fighters along on the mission as protection against the Japanese fighters. When these difficulties were combined with attitudes that the air defenses around Balikpapan would be weak, however, mission planners decided that the bombers would not need a fighter escort to the target.<sup>43</sup>

Just after midnight on September 30, 1944, the first of the B-24s took off for Balikpapan. Nine and a-half hours later 64 of the bombers arrived over Balikpapan and met what one report termed a "violent air reaction" and "stiff opposition."<sup>44</sup> Japanese fighters intercepted the bomber formation fifteen minutes before the target and the attacks continued for a half hour afterwards.<sup>45</sup> At least five bombers were lost and several so badly shot up that they wrecked on landing.<sup>46</sup> Thirty-nine of the B-24s returned to Balikpapan on October 3 and were again hammered by the Japanese fighters: seven bombers, all from the 307th Bombardment Group, were lost in the target area and several more aircraft were so heavily damaged that they had to be

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<sup>42</sup> Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks Against Strategic Enemy Oil Centers," [1945], file 750.424-1 HRA.

<sup>43</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:317.

<sup>44</sup> Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks;" Craven and Cate, 5:318-319.

<sup>45</sup> "Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks."

<sup>46</sup> "Balikpapan Strikes," KP; Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks;" Kenney, Reports, pp. 436-437; Craven and Cate, 5:318.

scrapped.<sup>47</sup> Out of the 104 bombers sent out in the two raids, twelve had not returned, some had been so badly damaged that they were written off, and others required extensive repairs. By one estimate almost forty percent of the bombers that flew the missions were either lost or out of commission.<sup>48</sup> Although some of the crews shot down were rescued by the submarines Redfin and Mingo posted near Balikpapan, or by seaplanes located along the flight path to and from the target, the losses were still devastating.<sup>49</sup>

After the horrific second mission, Kenney flew to Noemfoor to investigate. Understandably, he found "morale not too good."<sup>50</sup> As the commander of Thirteenth Air Force made tactical changes to the mission profiles, Kenney spent his time with the crews and "got the kids to let their hair down."<sup>51</sup> Although Kenney sympathized with them, he did not back off from his plan for future attacks on Balikpapan. Instead, he stressed the importance of mission, likely emphasizing his belief that destroying Balikpapan and capturing the Philippines might bring an end to the war, and tried to convince them that the changes in tactics, along with more bombers from Fifth Air Force and some long-range fighters, would cut their losses.<sup>52</sup> The need for fighter

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<sup>47</sup> "Balikpapan Strikes;" Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks;" Craven and Cate, 5:319.

<sup>48</sup> Crabb, Section 2, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Letter, Commander Submarines 7th Fleet to Commander 7th Fleet, "Narrative accounts of Lifeguard duties performed by submarines of Task Force 71 off Balikpapan, Borneo, September 24 to October 24," November 23, 1944, file 706.301 HRA; Craven and Cate, 5:317.

<sup>50</sup> Kenney diary, October 6, 1944, KP.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.; Kenney, Reports, p. 438.

escort to the target was made even more apparent by reports Kenney received about Japanese air reinforcements being flown in to defend the oil refineries, a move he likely viewed as confirmation of the value the Japanese attached to these targets.<sup>53</sup>

How much Kenney improved morale is uncertain, but he did make good on his promises to the aircrews for the next attack on Balikpapan. The planning for the mission was extremely thorough and involved raids on the nights prior to the attack as well as using an aircraft dedicated to spoofing the Japanese air defense radars.<sup>54</sup> Kenney also provided additional bombers from 5th Air Force and long-range fighters to escort the bombers. Although fifty fighter pilots reportedly volunteered to go with the bombers even without enough gas (planning on being rescued by seaplanes after they bailed out), Kenney did not have to resort to such desperate measures because it became possible to send some fighters along with the bombers.<sup>55</sup> During a visit to the southwest Pacific a few months earlier, Charles Lindbergh experimented with increasing the range of the P-38s by making a few changes in operating procedures. By reducing the engine's revolutions per minute, leaning out the fuel mixture, and increasing the manifold pressure while cruising to the targets, P-38s were able to increase their range to almost 2000 miles. While the new procedure fouled spark plugs and burned up engine cylinder heads, thereby increasing problems for the hardworking mechanics, spare engines and parts were now relatively easy to obtain, making these

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<sup>53</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 437.

<sup>54</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:320.

<sup>55</sup> Kenney diary, October 6, 1944, KP.

problems seemingly a small price to pay.<sup>56</sup> The P-47s also flew further than ever before thanks to three external fuel tanks and the newly-captured and repaired air strip at Morotai. They could not only make it all the way to Balikpapan, but had enough fuel to spend twenty-five minutes in the area.<sup>57</sup> Despite what the members of Thirteenth Air Force described as "stiff" enemy air resistance during the attack on October 10, 1944, the strike force of 106 bombers and 35 fighters overwhelmed the defenders and came away with only four bombers and one fighter missing.<sup>58</sup>

A repeat performance on October 14, including some 100 bombers and 60 fighters, brought similar results. Two bombers and five fighters were lost, although at least four of the fighter pilots were rescued. A final, almost anticlimactic, raid on Balikpapan was flown October 18. The bombers found the oil refineries obscured by clouds, which had also grounded the Japanese fighters, and simply dropped their bombs when the navigators guessed they were over the targets. Even with no enemy opposition, one B-24 and two P-38s were lost during the long mission.<sup>59</sup>

The mission on October 18 was the last one flown to Balikpapan. The invasion of Leyte would occur in only two more days and all of the aircraft in the command were needed to support MacArthur's return to the Philippines. From September 30

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<sup>56</sup> Yoshino, pp. 81-83. For Kenney's version see, Kenney Reports, pp. 411-415.

<sup>57</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, October 15, 1944, KP. Craven and Cate, 5:320 state that the P-47s carried two fuel tanks, one of 310-gallons under one wing and a 165-gallon tank on the other wing, a configuration that would have been very unstable, especially right after takeoff. Kenney reported using two 165-gallon tanks on each wing and using a 75-gallon tank on the belly of the aircraft, a more plausible arrangement.

<sup>58</sup> Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks;" "Balikpapan Strikes;" Kenney, Reports, p. 439.

<sup>59</sup> Thirteenth Air Force, "Attacks."

until October 18, Kenney's airmen had flown over 300 bombing missions and dropped over 400 tons of bombs while losing twenty-two B-24s. Kenney typically put the missions in the best possible light and claimed that they had "finished Balikpapan off for the rest of the war."<sup>60</sup> Damage assessments at the time, however, found that "the damage inflicted, considering the weight of the attacks, seems to be surprisingly small."<sup>61</sup> Some of the vital equipment at one plant had been put out of action, but other areas of the complex escaped relatively free from damage.<sup>62</sup> To be sure, the aviators on the mission gained valuable experience in long distance missions, but the loss of twenty-two bombers and nine fighters seems a large price to pay for experience that could have been gained more cheaply in other ways.<sup>63</sup>

Based on Kenney's objectives, however, the missions can only be judged a failure. While at one point Kenney might have believed that the attacks could affect air operations in the Philippines, moving the invasion of Leyte up to October 20 obviated this rationale before the missions were even flown. He knew full well that the attacks occurred too late to influence the air battles in the Philippines, yet he insisted on them, basing his reasoning largely on a "hunch" about the impact of the bombing raids on Tokyo. There is no evidence, however, that the attacks had any influence on Japanese political and military leaders. Not only was the damage done by the raids too small to

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<sup>60</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 440.

<sup>61</sup> Allied Air Force Intelligence Summary No. 247, October 29, 1944, file 706.307A HRA.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Craven and Cate, 5:322.

<sup>63</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:322 posited that long-distance flying experience as a "greatest gain" from these missions.



have any impact, but submarines were causing more havoc with the oil supply than Kenney, and most other Allied commanders at the time, realized.<sup>64</sup> Submarine attacks had virtually stopped oil shipments from Balikpapan to Manila in June 1944. Japanese tankers still sailed, but were now forced to travel south to Singapore and then north hugging the coast of China.<sup>65</sup> By the time of Kenney's attacks, fuel reserves in Japan were "critically low."<sup>66</sup> Submarines had already forced Japanese leaders to face a potential oil shortage. A post-war survey concluded that Kenney's raids had no "strategic effect because more oil was always available . . . than could be shipped out."<sup>67</sup>

Although the B-24s missions to Balikpapan were largely ineffective, the question remains of whether it would have been better to send B-29s to Kenney rather than basing them in China. Leaving aside the political effect of the decision, its clear that from a military perspective that the overall record of the aircraft was, according to the official history, "not a successful one."<sup>68</sup> Problems during production of the aircraft caused delays in training aircrews and the first aircraft did not arrive in China until April 1944. They flew the first combat mission on June 5, and the first mission against Japan occurred two days later; but when the missions from China ended in

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen, Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 145.

<sup>65</sup> USSBS, The War Against Japanese Transportation 1941-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), pp. 50, 103.

<sup>66</sup> Quote from MacArthur Reports, 2:305; Ibid., p. 104; Spector, Eagle, p. 486.

<sup>67</sup> USSBS, Oil, p. 65.

<sup>68</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:175.

January 1945, only nine missions had been flown against targets in Japan. A variety of logistical and technical problems burdened the effort and severely limited plans for employing the bombers.<sup>69</sup>

A post-war survey validated Kenney's claims for using the bombers instead of sending them to China. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, a team of civilian analysts and military officers commissioned by President Roosevelt to investigate the effects of bombing on Germany and Japan during World War II, concluded that prior to capturing the Marianas Islands and flying missions against Japan itself, the B-29s would have been better used against Japanese shipping and "in destroying oil and metal plants in the southern areas."<sup>70</sup> While using the B-29s in the Southwest Pacific may have been a more efficient use of the aircraft, which was the implicit criteria used by the Strategic Bombing Survey, there is little evidence to suggest that it would have been any more effective in ending the war. If, for example, Kenney had been able to start bombing the oil refineries in May 1944, the disruption in petroleum may have adversely impacted air and naval operations in the southwest Pacific, but it seems unlikely that this loss would have convinced, or even encouraged, Japanese leaders to surrender.<sup>71</sup> The best evidence against Kenney's supposition is the fact the surrender of Japan followed a series of comparatively devastating events,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 5:55-57, 78, 99-100; Hansell, Strategic Air War, pp. 142-166.

<sup>70</sup> USSBS, Summary Report (Pacific War) (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 29. The authoritative study of the Strategic Bombing Survey is David MacIsaac, Strategic Bombing in World War Two (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976).

<sup>71</sup> Falk, p. 154, for a similar conclusion.

including a complete naval blockade, fire-bombing of most of the largest cities, the dropping of two atomic bombs, and swift Russian victories against the Japanese forces in Manchuria. By almost any measure, any one of these other events exceeded the shock or dismay caused by the bombing of Balikpapan. Kenney's contention about the value of bombing Balikpapan, and one which was probably shared by many other officers as well as politicians, was that the military conditions for defeat (the loss of oil refineries in this case) would automatically (and quickly) lead to the political decision to surrender. Such a belief bore little resemblance to the process that actually ended World War II.<sup>72</sup>

### **Return to the Philippines**

As Kenney pursued his efforts at inducing a Japanese surrender through the bombing of the oil refineries at Balikpapan, he was also involved with planning for the invasion of Leyte. As in the planning for Hollandia, air operations for the invasion of Leyte, called King Two, involved both aircraft carriers and land-based aircraft. Just as in the Hollandia operation, there would be no single air commander for King Two. Instead, the invasion area was divided geographically and each commander was

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<sup>72</sup> For the Japanese case the most recent overview is Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," Diplomatic History 19 (Spring 1995): 251-255. On the problem of war termination in general, Fred C. Ikle, Every War Must End (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); Stephen J. Cimbala, Conflict Termination and Military Strategy: Coercion, Persuasion, and War (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); William T. R. Fox, ed., Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 392 (November 1970); Michael Handel, "The Study of War Termination," The Journal of Strategic Studies 1 (May 1978):51-75.

allocated responsibility for a given area with no attempt to introduce arrangements for using the forces in concert.<sup>73</sup>

The Fifth Fleet fast carrier task forces under the command of Admiral Halsey were assigned the task of protecting the invasion force from the Japanese fleet and air reinforcements that might be sent from Formosa or the northern Philippines to Leyte. Beginning ten days prior to the invasion date (termed A-day by MacArthur to distinguish it from D-day in Normandy), Halsey's carriers would work, in a general pattern, from the bases furthest away to those nearby. The first air strikes were planned for Japanese airfields on Okinawa, Formosa, and northern Luzon. Four days before A-day, the task forces would shift southward and attack enemy positions on Leyte and Cebu, while bombers from Army Air Force units in China attacked Formosa.<sup>74</sup> Halsey's units were to stay north Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago (the official line of separation was 9 degrees north latitude), while Kenney's units were allowed to attack targets anywhere south of Mindanao.<sup>75</sup> (Figure 4)

During the invasion itself the fleet would be positioned about one hundred miles east of Luzon and guard the invasion force against any Japanese naval attacks. Direct

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<sup>73</sup> Major General Stephen Chamberlin and Vice Admiral Forest P. Sherman, Memorandum to CinC SWPA, CinC POA, "Coordination of Operations," September 21, 1944, file 720.322 HRA; Message, Advanced Headquarters General Headquarters Southwest Pacific, to Commander 3rd Fleet, Allied Naval Forces, Allied Air Forces, September 30, 1944, in "Appendix 6 to Annex G Operation Plan 13-44," file 720.311 HRA (hereafter Operation Plan 13-44).

<sup>74</sup> Commander Task Force 78 to Commander in Chief U.S. Fleet, "Leyte Operation," November 10, 1944, p. 5; Operation Plan 13-44; Allied Naval Forces, SOWESPAC Area, Task Force 73 Naval Air Force and Commander Aircraft, Seventh Fleet, "Operation Plan 8-44," October 15, 1944, pp. 2-3, Archives United States Marine Corps Library, Quantico, Virginia; Boggs, pp. 12-13.

<sup>75</sup> Commander Task Force 78, "Leyte Operation," p. 5.

support and protection, in the form of air cover and bombing during the amphibious landing, would be provided by the escort carriers and other ships assigned to Admiral Kinkaid, the Allied Naval Forces commander. Kinkaid would remain in charge of air operations until both he and Kenney agreed that land-based aviation could take the place of the escort carriers.<sup>76</sup>

While Kenney's aircraft would not participate directly in the invasion, they continued to carry out air strikes anywhere from Mindanao south and patrolled the western flank of the Philippines as protection against any Japanese attempts to send a naval force against the American armada.<sup>77</sup> Most importantly, the Allied Air Forces prepared to move into Leyte quickly and take over responsibility for supporting the invasion from the carriers. Kenney designated Whitehead's Fifth Air Force as the assault air force and Colonel David Hutchinson and the staff of the 308th Bombardment Wing would serve as the air task force headquarters.<sup>78</sup> Hutchinson was to have two fighter groups and one night fighter squadron operating on Leyte airfields five days after the attack and ten days later be able to use three additional groups, including a medium bomber unit.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Commander Task Force 78, "Leyte Operation,": pp. 2-3; "Operation Plan 13-44;" Commander Allied Air Forces, "Operations Instruction 71," September 24, 1944, p. 4, Archives, United States Marine Corps Library; Headquarters FEAF, p. 15.

<sup>77</sup> FEAF, p. 13-14.

<sup>78</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, September 18, 1944, file 730.161-3 HRA; Herring, n.p.

<sup>79</sup> Allied Air Forces, Operations Instruction 71.

Figure 4--Philippine Islands<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:277.

Kenney's aircraft needed to get on Leyte quickly and take over from Kinkaid's escort carriers. As Kenney had pointed out to MacArthur earlier, the ships themselves could not stay in the area indefinitely because they needed to be rearmed and refueled.<sup>81</sup> If the carriers were forced to leave the area for any reason prior to the airfields becoming operational, the soldiers of Sixth Army on the ground in Leyte would be vulnerable to attacks from whatever Japanese aircraft remained and there would be no way to cut off reinforcements from other islands in the Philippines. As the engineers realized, "the rapid development of airdromes on Leyte . . . would be of critical importance."<sup>82</sup>

Capturing the airfields on Leyte was also uppermost in the mind of Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, the commander of Sixth Army, when he planned the two corps landing on the eastern coast of Leyte. Two divisions of X Corps would land near Tacloban, capture the airfield, and then move inland to control the northern portion of the island. The airfield at Dulag would be captured by XXIV Corps, recently diverted from their planned attack on Yap. XXIV Corps would then advance westward to control the area around the remaining three airdromes and eliminate the Japanese presence in the southern part of the island.<sup>83</sup>

As Allied plans for the invasion of Leyte moved forward, so did Japanese plans for the island's defense. The strategic situation committed Japanese military leaders to

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<sup>81</sup> Kenney, "Application of the Reno V Plan."

<sup>82</sup> Engineers, 6:284.

<sup>83</sup> M. Hamlin Cannon, Leyte: The Return to the Philippines (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954), pp. 31-34.

pay a stiff price in defending the Philippines. Losing this territory would cut off Japan from its armies and the resources in the southern area, and make the homeland vulnerable to invasion. Since the Japanese did not know where the American forces would attack, they developed four different variations of the Sho-Go (victory) plan, all based on the basic assumption that once one of these plans was initiated every available reinforcement would be rushed to the threatened area and used in a "decisive battle" with the American forces. This battle, Japanese military leaders hoped, would inflict huge losses that might convince the American people of the need to end the war. Sho-Go 1 was the plan against an invasion of the Philippines, Sho-Go 2 for Formosa, Sho-Go 3 for southern Japan, and Sho-Go 4 was the defense of the northern Japanese islands.<sup>84</sup>

Preparations for Sho-Go 1 involved several actions. Since a basic premise of the plan was that additional reinforcements, especially aircraft, would be sent to whatever area was threatened, an additional thirty airfields were built in the Philippines. To preserve their naval aircraft, which had been decimated in previous attacks on aircraft carriers, and ineffective at stopping previous landings, the Japanese elected to stop attacking the carriers prior to the arrival of the amphibious force and to concentrate on the troop transports during the landing phase, a decision that explains why Halsey encountered a lack of air opposition during his attacks on the Philippines in September and which prompted his proposal to speed up the invasion of the

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<sup>84</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2: 307-309.



Philippines.<sup>85</sup> The Japanese Naval staff also developed plans for a decisive sea battle based on drawing away the protecting naval craft and concentrating on the transports. Because the Americans could invade the Philippines at a number of spots, ground commanders decided to make their defensive stand on Luzon rather than one of the smaller central or southern islands.<sup>86</sup>

On the eve of the American invasion of Leyte, the top army position in the Philippines was the commander of the Southern Army, General Yamashita Tomoyuki. At his disposal was the 4th Air Army commanded by Lieutenant General Tominaga Kyoyi at Clark Field. Tominaga had between four and five hundred aircraft in and around the island of Luzon, but at any one time only about half of those were operational.<sup>87</sup> Naval aircraft of the First Air Fleet in the Philippines had been badly mauled in their earlier attacks against the American carriers and were in the process of rebuilding their units prior to the invasion. First Air Fleet had about 400 aircraft, but only were able to have half that number flying at one time, but would be reinforced by 300 aircraft from the Second Air Fleet in Formosa.<sup>88</sup> By comparison, Kenney's Far East Air Forces, with over 2,600 combat aircraft, greatly outnumbered the Japanese;

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<sup>85</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2: 319-320, 322-325, 343, 345.

<sup>86</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2: 326-327.

<sup>87</sup> Estimates of Japanese aircraft strength vary depending on the source. Major Takahashi Kohie, Air Liason Officer, 35th Army in 10th Information and Historical Service, Headquarters Eighth Army, "Staff Study of Operations of the Japanese 35th Army on Leyte," pp. 1, 3, Eichelberger Papers; Commander Yamagucki Moriyoshi, Operations Officer Second Air Fleet, Commander First Combined Base Force, Imperial Japanese Navy, October 26, 1945, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 1:178; MacArthur Reports, 2: 331; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 162-163.

<sup>88</sup> Yamagucki, 1:178; Reports of MacArthur, 2:331-333.

but without any airfields in range, he was essentially powerless in attacking the Philippines.<sup>89</sup> The defense of the southern and central islands in the Philippines fell to Lieutenant General Suzuki Sosaku, the commander of 35th Army. Leyte itself was defended by the 16th Division which was charged with defending the air bases near Tacloban, Dulag, and Burauen. In the case of an American attack on Leyte, Suzuki planned to send parts of two divisions through the port of Ormoc on the western coast of the island as reinforcements.<sup>90</sup>

While ULTRA intercepts provided a wealth of information about the strength of the Japanese air units in the Philippines, American knowledge about the Japanese intentions was limited.<sup>91</sup> Although aware that losing the Philippines would cut off the home islands of Japan from oil and other natural resources in the southern area of the empire, American intelligence officers generally assumed that the logical course of action for the Japanese would be to reserve their limited numbers of working aircraft for a defense of Formosa, Luzon, or the home islands. While the possibility of air strikes against the invasion force was not dismissed, large numbers of attackers were thought unlikely.<sup>92</sup> Most of the high ranking American naval commanders likewise dismissed the possibility of a large-scale naval engagement for Leyte.<sup>93</sup> Kenney's

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<sup>89</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:337. Aircraft strength for August 31, 1944.

<sup>90</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2: 326-327, 340-342, 357.

<sup>91</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 155.

<sup>92</sup> Allied Air Forces, "Operations Instruction 71," Annex 3 (Intelligence), pp. 1-4; "G-2 Estimate of the enemy situation with respect to an operation against the Leyte Gulf Area," September 30, 1944, pp. 8-10, 14, Landers papers.

<sup>93</sup> Spector, Eagle, p. 426; Barbey, p. 279.

attitude about the ability of the Japanese air units to impact operations had not changed since late July. Despite the losses suffered during the Balikpapan raids, as he departed Hollandia with MacArthur on October 16 onboard the Nashville he felt uncomfortable and out of his element, but confident that only submarines and mines could cause trouble for the invasion force.<sup>94</sup>

As the Nashville sailed towards Leyte, reports arrived of the attacks by Halsey's carriers on the Japanese air bases in Formosa and the Philippines. The Japanese had abandoned their short-lived intent to withhold attacks against the aircraft carriers (largely because they found they were losing too many aircraft on the ground) and met Halsey's raid in force. While the Japanese pilot's damaged two cruisers, they did not sink any of the American ships.<sup>95</sup> The attacks did, however, inflict heavy losses on the Japanese. Second Air Fleet was down to about 230 aircraft and less than 200 aircraft remained of the army aircraft in the Philippines.<sup>96</sup> While the losses of Japanese aircraft were severe, the perception among the Allied commanders, based on Halsey's reports, was that the damage was even greater. Despite ULTRA indications to the contrary, MacArthur's intelligence officer recorded on the day of the invasion, "nearly all aircraft in Leyte reported destroyed."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kenney diary, October 16, 1944, KP.

<sup>95</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:353; Wheeler, p. 389.

<sup>96</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 162-163, gives slightly higher numbers than previous sources. See Takashaki, pp. 3, 10; Yamaguchi, p. 178; Reports of MacArthur, 2:363;

<sup>97</sup> Military Intelligence Section, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, "Daily Summary of Enemy Intelligence, October 19/20, 1944," p.2, Willoughby Papers.

On the morning of October 20, 1944, hundreds of amphibious landing craft steamed towards the beaches of Leyte. The initial Japanese resistance on the beachheads was quickly dispatched since the Japanese planned to wear down the American units as they advanced inland and did not attempt to destroy the landing forces on the beaches. The landing by X Corps near Tacloban took place on two beaches, the northern-most termed White beach, the one to the south, Red. The amphibious engineers at White beach encountered "almost no opposition,"<sup>98</sup> largely because the Japanese did not expect a landing that far north on the island, allowing the Americans to quickly unload troops and equipment. But on Red Beach the landing plan began to unravel. A sand bar 100 yards from the shoreline grounded most of the larger amphibious craft, including the 300 foot long LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) which carried up to 2,000 tons of cargo and most of the heavy equipment. One LST made it to shore, while another lowered its forward ramp in an attempt to discharge its cargo and promptly sank a bulldozer in eight feet of water, jamming its loading ramp in the process. In addition, the large numbers of enemy troops near Red Beach, where a landing was expected, put up heavy resistance, lobbing mortar shells and pouring machine gun fire into the grounded ships.<sup>99</sup>

The existence of the sand bar did not come as a total surprise to the engineers in the landing force. The beaches in the Philippines had been extensively studied and,

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<sup>98</sup> Put 'em Across, p. 101; Engineers, 6: 287-289.

<sup>99</sup> Put 'em Across, p. 103; Cannon, pp. 67-72. Description of the LST from Spector, Eagle, p. 230.

according to the Sixth Army engineer, "the survey definitely showed the LSTs would ground 250 to 300 feet off Red Beach."<sup>100</sup> Since there were sound tactical reasons for using this landing beach, the engineers proposed shifting two LSTs in the XXIV Corps convoy loaded with pontoon causeways to X Corps. Once the enemy troops were removed from the landing site, the pontoons could be unloaded and used to move the material the 300 feet from the sandbar to the shore. Control over the LSTs, however, fell to officers in the Allied Naval Forces who argued that the LSTs should not be transferred until they were needed. A small problem it seemed, but one with potentially important consequences.<sup>101</sup>

As the LSTs with the pontoon causeways made their way to Red Beach, the other LSTs could not simply be kept floating; they had to be unloaded and sent back for more equipment. Even when the pontoons arrived the engineers had trouble getting them in place. Some troops and equipment were hurriedly transferred to smaller craft and shuttled to shore, but this method was time consuming. Other transports bringing successive waves of equipment and troops were told to move north and discharged their cargoes on the best available spot, a flat spit of land just above White Beach: Tacloban airfield.<sup>102</sup> With amphibian engineers able to rapidly unload vast amounts of

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<sup>100</sup> Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis, Jr., "Engineer Operations in the Leyte Campaign, Part 1," The Military Engineer 39 (November 1947): 461.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.; Casey, Engineering Memoirs, pp. 224-226; Dod, pp. 576-577.

<sup>102</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 1" p.462; Dod, p. 577; Canon, p. 82; Put 'em Across, p. 263.

cargo (the peak during the Leyte invasion was 100 tons an hour), they quickly stacked an estimated 4,000 tons of equipment on the runway.<sup>103</sup>

From Kenney's position on the Nashville he did not see the problems afflicting his new airfield at Tacloban. On the afternoon of A-day, October 20, he accompanied MacArthur for the latter's triumphant return to the Philippines and over the next few days he and MacArthur stayed aboard ship, making several trips ashore to monitor the progress of the attack and participating in a variety of official functions.<sup>104</sup> It was not until October 23, two days before his units were scheduled to take over the air duties over Leyte, that Kenney discovered LSTs were using the runway at Tacloban to unload troops, supplies, and ammunition. Kenney quickly went to both Krueger and MacArthur in an effort to stop it. Kenney returned the next day and found twenty-eight more ships had tried to unload, but the air task force commander had been able to stop them by invoking the authority of Kenney and Krueger.<sup>105</sup> The damage was done, however, and the field was clogged with troops, supplies, and equipment, making it impossible for the engineers to do any work. Kenney threatened to bulldoze any supplies into the ocean if they were not removed in a hurry.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the 24th Division to the south had moved inland and captured the airfields at Dulag and San Pablo, but engineers had not planned on having either of those fields ready as

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<sup>103</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 1" p. 462; Dod, p. 578.

<sup>104</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 450.

<sup>105</sup> Kenney diary, October 23, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, pp. 450, 454.

<sup>106</sup> Kenney diary, October 24, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 455; Engineers, 6:290-291.

quickly as Tacloban. It was clear that Kenney would not be able to take over air support of the invasion from Admiral Kinkaid on October 25.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to clearing the airfield at Tacloban of equipment, engineers also battled with a host of other problems. The runway at Tacloban was covered with land mines and after those were cleared engineers discovered that the runway was only 4,300 feet long, not 6,000 feet as projected, and the centerline of runway had to be shifted ten degrees in order to meet the required 6,000 foot length. In addition, the soil was too soft and coral or gravel was needed for support before the steel landing mats could be laid.<sup>108</sup> The supplies piled on the runway and resulting congestion further slowed the delivery of coral to the airfield and further delayed construction.<sup>109</sup>

While Kenney tried to push the work on Tacloban along, his naval counterpart, Admiral Kinkaid, had his hands full with the Japanese naval reaction to the invasion. By this stage in the war the Japanese navy was no match for the huge carrier task forces the American Navy was able to put to sea. The naval plan for the Sho-Go plan for the Philippines depended on luring away carriers in order to overwhelm and destroy the amphibious landing force. The result was the largest, and according to most naval historians, the greatest sea battle ever fought: the battle of Leyte Gulf.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> October 23, 1944, KP.

<sup>108</sup> Major W. G. Caples, "Airfield Construction on Leyte," Aviation Engineer Notes 33 (March 1945), pp. 8-9, COE V, 25, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 9; Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 1" p. 462; Sixth Army, p. 209.

<sup>110</sup> The following have been used to outline the actions in the sea battle at Leyte Gulf. Classic accounts are Samuel Eliot Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. 12, Leyte (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958) and C. Vann Woodward, The Battle for Leyte Gulf (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947). The most recent study is Thomas J. Cutler, The

Upon initiation of the Sho-Go plan, the Japanese planned to send a carrier task force under Vice Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo to lure away Halsey's carriers which they suspected would be stationed to the northeast of Luzon. If Halsey took the bait, Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita could easily blast his way through the escort carriers and other surface units screening the transports laying in Leyte Gulf and wreak havoc on the landings. Kurita's force actually split into two parts. Kurita himself would attack from the north through the San Bernardino Strait, while Vice Admiral Nishimura Teiji with a smaller force sailed through the Sulu Sea and Surigao Strait to the south. The resulting pincer would, it was hoped, crush the landing force. Simultaneously, air units would refrain from attacking until air reinforcements could be rushed into the Philippines in order to combine large attacks with the naval action.

The first confirmed warnings about the American attack on Leyte arrived in Tokyo on October 17 and official orders activating the Sho-Go plan for the Philippines were issued the next day, with October 24 tentatively designated as the day of the attack (later changed to October 25).<sup>111</sup> The Japanese attack occurred as planned. Halsey took the bait and steamed northward to engage Ozawa's carriers. Kincaid maneuvered his surface to block Nishimura's force and the American ships decimated the Japanese force as it sailed through the Surigao Strait. Kincaid's maneuvering and Halsey's dash north, however, left only the escort carriers guarding the landing force.

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Battle of Leyte Gulf, 23-26 October 1944 (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994). A Japanese reconstruction is in MacArthur Reports, II:382-401. Also, Spector, Eagle, pp. 417-442.

<sup>111</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:365-369, 384-386.



At dawn on October 25 Kurita was spotted moving towards Leyte Gulf. Thanks to the gallant actions of innumerable naval officers, and poor communications and leadership on the part of the Japanese, Kurita turned away just 45 miles from Leyte.

Japanese air opposition on the first few days after the landing at Leyte was light, as units awaited October 25 and the infusion of reinforcements. Halsey's attacks on the Philippine airfields prior to the landings at Leyte had inflict large losses, and on October 20, the First Air Fleet had less than 50 flyable aircraft, while the 4th Air Army was down about 100.<sup>112</sup> The Japanese, however, were still willing to make up these losses. The 7th Air Division from the Celebes flew into Luzon as did numerous aircraft from Japan. By October 23, there were about 250 Japanese naval aircraft in the islands along with almost 200 army planes.<sup>113</sup> Almost 200 naval aircraft made the first mass attacks against Halsey's carriers on October 24 and about 100 army aircraft bombed the landing forces in Leyte Gulf. The attacks continued over the next several days accompanied by a new, terrifying tactic, the kamikaze or suicide attacks.

Although there had been suicide attacks previously in the Pacific, the desperate situation the Japanese faced in October 1944 forced them into extreme measures. Tokko, or Special-Attack units were specifically organized to carry out such missions. Although Tokko was the name give to all units that carried out these missions, the name kamikaze originally only applied to naval air units, but adopted by American forces as a general designation. The first kamikaze attack was carried out on October

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<sup>112</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2: 371; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 162-163.

<sup>113</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:377-378, 387, fn. 71.

21, but the massed attacks which brought home the power of this weapon were carried out by naval fighters carrying very small bombs on the morning of October 25. Although using aircraft in this manner was expensive (an aircraft on a conventional bombing mission can be used many times over, not to mention the pilot), it brought immediate results. In the Leyte campaign every Japanese aircraft on a kamikaze mission managed to sink or damage an American ship. At the same time other army and navy aircraft carried out conventional bombing missions in large numbers; after October 24 the Japanese managed to fly over 100 missions a day against the invasion force.<sup>114</sup>

On October 25, as Kinkaid's forces were dealing with Kurita's attack, Kenney moved ashore with MacArthur and experienced the Japanese air attacks firsthand. While inspecting the progress on Tacloban he "had to hit the dirt three times in an hour."<sup>115</sup> The bombing raids by the Japanese, and navy aircraft forced inland because of Japanese attacks and damage to the escort carriers, slowed work on the airdrome. With only 2,000 feet of the old Japanese landing strip available, twenty-five of the sixty-five Navy aircraft that landed on Tacloban were wrecked and had to be shoved into the water. The same problems were also affecting the engineers at Dulag, where the combination of enemy attacks and emergency landings made work almost impossible.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:400, 404, fn. 130, 405, fn. 132, 561-563, 566, 569; Syohgo Hattori, "Kamikaze: Japan's Glorious Failure," Air Power History 43 (Spring 1996): 16-19.

<sup>115</sup> Kenney diary, October 25, 1944, KP.

<sup>116</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 1" p. 463.

At the same time, a ground reconnaissance by engineering officers in Sixth Army of the interior airfields disclosed that those areas were ill-suited for airfield development. At a conference on October 24, the engineers tried to talk Kenney into concentrating all of the engineering efforts of Tacloban and Dulag. Perhaps because he wanted an airfield which could handle the heavy bombers, and neither Tacloban or Dulag would fulfill that requirement, he insisted that the engineers continue working at the other locations.<sup>117</sup>

By the evening of October 26 engineers were putting the finishing touches on the runway and dispersal areas at Tacloban, and Kenney ordered the first P-38s in the next day.<sup>118</sup> The aircraft carriers had taken a beating during the sea battles in Leyte Gulf and needed immediate relief. Two of Kinkaid's escort carriers were sunk, at least half were incapacitated in some way, those that were not damaged were running short of fuel, and he had lost over 100 aircraft.<sup>119</sup> Late on October 25, Kinkaid requested help from Kenney in covering Leyte Gulf.

Can [fighters] be flown in tomorrow? Apparently the enemy has flown in a large number of aircraft into the Philippines in addition strong Japanese surface units got through San Bernadino Strait last nite [sic]. Our CVEs have been crippled severely by repeated air and surface attacks today. Probably less than half the group can function at all. The maximum CVE air effort has been extended in self defense with subsequent inability to provide [fighter] cover for Leyte . . . Task groups 38.1 and 38.2 will be here tomorrow morning and will be able to furnish [fighter] cover but those groups should be hitting enemy surface vessels in the area as well as attacking enemy aircraft in the air and on

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<sup>117</sup> Casey, pp. 231-232; Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 2," p. 515.

<sup>118</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 2," p. 514.

<sup>119</sup> Craven and Cate, V:368-369; Wheeler, p. 403; Woodward, p. 215.

the ground. It is of utmost importance that land based [fighters] be established in Leyte immediately.<sup>120</sup>

Halsey, however, faced some of the same problems as Kinkaid and on that same night also pleaded for relief. Halsey told MacArthur, "After 17 days of battle my fast carriers are unable to provide extended support for Leyte but 2 groups are available October 27. The pilots are exhausted, and the carriers are low in provisions, bombs, and torpedoes. When will land-based air take over at Leyte?"<sup>121</sup> In effect, Halsey's message confirmed the very problems Kenney voiced earlier about relying upon carriers, but the confession was probably of little comfort at the time. For his part, Halsey was not aware of the myriad of difficulties involved at the airfield at Tacloban. All he cared about was the fact that Kenney was supposed to take over the air duties five days after the invasion.<sup>122</sup>

Powerless to accelerate the construction, embarrassed by the Navy's demands, and concerned about the strength of the Japanese attacks, Kenney grew increasingly frustrated and irritated over what he perceived to be irrational actions by the Navy. He clashed frequently with Captain Richard Whitehead, who served on Kinkaid's staff and was in charge of directing aircraft in the amphibious landing area, over different procedures and did not understand why the Navy would not put some of their aircraft over land or why they remained on the ground after warning of an enemy air

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<sup>120</sup> Message, CTF 77 [Kinkaid] to CinC SWPA, October 25, 1944, in USSBS, Fifth Air Force, figure 18.

<sup>121</sup> Message, Halsey to MacArthur, October 26, 1944, quoted in Morison, 12:340-341.

<sup>122</sup> Halsey, p. 228.

attack.<sup>123</sup> The last straw occurred on October 26 as Kenney was making plans to bring forward the first P-38s. According to Kenney, the navy "immediately started giving instructions" about using the aircraft.<sup>124</sup> "As soon as one squadron arrives," he vowed, "I'm taking the responsibility for the whole Leyte Gulf show."<sup>125</sup> Kenney convinced MacArthur of the need to get rid of the Navy as soon as the first P-38s landed, and the subsequent directive not only put Kenney in control of air operations in Leyte Gulf, but ordered the Navy away from any targets in the Philippines.<sup>126</sup>

Although Kenney moved one squadron into Tacloban on October 27, he was in no position to take over air operations. A temporary fighter command post, six air defense radars and an RAAF wireless unit had landed on Leyte during the initial stages of the invasion, but heavy rainfall delayed the installation of much of the equipment and ground observers had to be pressed into service to provide early warning of Japanese air attacks.<sup>127</sup> A typhoon on the night of October 29 slowed the movement of any additional fighters into Leyte, and on October 30 Whitehead, Kenney's former deputy who had arrived at Leyte to command operations, only had 20 P-38s to defend against Japanese attacks, a concern Kenney brushed off but one which was a genuine

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<sup>123</sup> Kenney diary, October 25, 26, 1944, KP; Wheeler, p. 401; General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area, "Standard Operating Procedure Instructions Number 16/2 Cooperative Action Land-Based and Carrier-Based Aircraft in Support of Landing Operations," September 26, 1944, p. 1, file 710.301A HRA.

<sup>124</sup> Kenney diary, October 26, 1944, KP.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Kenney diary, October 27, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 28, 1944, Wilson papers.

<sup>127</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:370-371; Bleakley, pp. 171-173.

problem since, at the same time, the Japanese could muster almost 300 aircraft in the Philippines.<sup>128</sup>

At bottom Kenney needed more airfields to get more aircraft into Leyte, but bad weather continued to plague the engineers efforts. Two typhoons and many smaller storms pounded Leyte with 24 inches of rain during the first forty days of the operation and the amount of rainfall recorded in November was almost twice the usual amount. "Construction under these conditions," recalled the Sixth Army Engineer, "became a nightmare."<sup>129</sup> The rains not only hampered construction of the airfields, but also turned the roads into muddy bogs, making it impossible to move fuel, ammunition, or equipment anywhere. Engineers were yanked off the airfields to help repair roads, a move which delayed airfield construction further, and frustrated Kenney, since additional engineering battalions did not arrive until November 12.<sup>130</sup> Despite Kenney's directive to the engineers to continue building at the previously planned sites, the proposed airfield near San Pablo was quickly stopped. The airfields at Buri and Bayug were continued and used for a time, but eventually abandoned.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 30, 1944, Whitehead papers. On October 31 4th Air Army had 148 planes and the First Combined Base Air Force (the combined headquarters for First and Second Air Flotilla) had 149. MacArthur Reports, 2:405, fn. 131.

<sup>129</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 2," pp. 515, 517; Casey, p. 228. The 30 year mean rainfall for Leyte in November was 11.86 inches, in 1944, 20.82 inches fell. Although only four inches of rain fell in October, all of it was after October 24. Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 2," p. 517.

<sup>130</sup> Casey, pp. 231-232; Dod, p. 584; Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis, Jr., "Engineer Operations in the Leyte Campaign, Part 3," The Military Engineer 40 (January 1948), p. 15.

<sup>131</sup> 5th Air Force Engineers, "Leyte Report," pp. 8-10; Air Evaluation Board, Southwest Pacific, "Leyte Based Air Activity, A-Day to A plus 41," December 13, 1944, file 730.306-5 HRA; Sixth Army, p. 233; Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 3," p. 17.

With only Tacloban and Dulag operating, and neither capable of handling any bombers, engineers cast about for additional sites. The best location, terrain-wise, was near Tanauan, then the current location for the headquarters of Sixth Army. Fortunately, Krueger was aware of the desperate need for more airfields and agreed to move his headquarters. Work began on the site on November 28 and by the middle of December the airfield was operating.<sup>132</sup>

The lack of airfields and the inability to defend against Japanese attacks had an immediate impact on the course of the fighting on Leyte as the campaign progressed through November and December. The Japanese bombed Kenney's airfields, supply areas, and the ships bringing additional troops and equipment to Leyte. Kenney took great risks to push as much of his air strength forward as possible. The airfields at Tacloban and Dulag overflowed with aircraft and supplies, making them prime targets for the Japanese air attacks. In the first two weeks of operation at Tacloban, a quarter of the almost 50 P-38s lost were destroyed on the ground by enemy air attacks. During November and December Kenney lost about 100 aircraft each month, a situation that prompted him to plead for more aircraft, a request answered by Arnold with a warning that the rate at which Kenney was chewing up aircraft placed an excessive burden on aircraft production and resources.<sup>133</sup> Even at the beginning of

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<sup>132</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 3," p. 18.

<sup>133</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, November 24, 1944, KP; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 15, 1944, November 18, 1944, file, 730.161-3 HRA: Kenney, interview with Green, p. 31; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 28, 1944, Wilson papers.

December Kenney had less than 200 available aircraft on Leyte while the Japanese continued to pour aircraft into Luzon.<sup>134</sup>

Stopping the Japanese air attacks became particularly difficult because of the nature of the suicide attacks against American ships.<sup>135</sup> The kamikaze attacks proved extremely difficult to defend against because of the need to disable the aircraft or kill the pilot before they got close to the target. Hits that would stop a regular aircraft were simply ineffective in preventing these new attacks. When the Japanese shifted to nighttime or dawn attacks, Kenney's daytime fighters like the P-38s were useless and the squadron of P-61 night fighters sent to Leyte proved too slow to catch the Japanese fighters. The night raids became so troublesome that Halsey prodded Kenney into replacing the slow P-61s with a Marine Corps night fighter squadron which proved more effective in stopping the night attacks.<sup>136</sup>

While aircraft on Leyte provided local air defense, over both shore and sea targets, Kenney need some means to prevent the Japanese aircraft from ever getting airborne. ULTRA intercepts tracked the aircraft as they moved up from Borneo and the Malaya allowing Kenney's bombers flying from the recently-completed air field on Morotai to attack the Japanese aircraft at their staging bases before they flew off for the

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<sup>134</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 63; Colonel Matsumae, 4th Air Army, quoted in Morison, 12:166, fn.12; Drea, pp. 163-164.

<sup>135</sup> Spector, Eagle, p. 440. Perhaps taking advantage of literary license Kenney claimed to witness a kamikaze attack on October 20 against the cruiser Honolulu. This cruiser was hit on that day and had to be withdrawn, but it was struck by a torpedo from a torpedo bomber, not a kamikaze. Although the first large-sized attacks did not occur until October 25, the HMAS Australia was hit by a suicide bomber on October 21. Kenney, Reports, p. 449; Morison, 12:145-146, 148.

<sup>136</sup> Kenney diary, November 26, 30, 1944, KP; Boggs, pp. 29-32, 45.



Philippines.<sup>137</sup> Kenney also began investigating other possibilities for airfields. He flew to Palau in late November and managed to move a B-24 bomb group there that could to hit targets in the southern part of Luzon.<sup>138</sup> The bulk of the Japanese airfields on Luzon, however, remained inaccessible except from aircraft carriers. Despite his desire to take complete control of air operations, almost immediately after getting his aircraft into Tacloban, Kenney was forced to ask MacArthur to request that Halsey continue to hit the airfields on Luzon. The carriers were eventually forced to stay around the Philippines until late November and Halsey had to cancel a planned attack against Tokyo and the Japanese battle fleet.<sup>139</sup> This turn of events frustrated Halsey so much that after the war he complained that he was forced to stay around the Philippines because of "Kenney's inability to give Leyte effective air support. I had to stand by and attend to his knitting for him."<sup>140</sup> Halsey's comments underscores the problems facing the commanders on Leyte in the fall of 1944 and the level of hostility between Kenney and the naval air commanders.<sup>141</sup>

Along with their unrelenting air attacks, the Japanese also began to move large numbers of ground forces into the port of Ormoc in western Leyte. The enthusiastic,

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<sup>137</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, October 30, 1944, p. 1, Whitehead papers; Reports of MacArthur, 2:378; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 163.

<sup>138</sup> November 5, 24, 1944, KP: AEB, "Leyte," p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Kenney diary, October 30, 1944, November 2, 3, 1944, KP; Halsey, pp. 230, 242; Morison, 12:341-343, 345-360.

<sup>140</sup> Halsey, p. 242.

<sup>141</sup> For other examples, see Halsey, pp. 160, 183; E. B. Potter, Bull Halsey (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1985), pp. 308-310, 312.

but misleading, reports by the Japanese Navy about the destruction of the American fleet convinced Japanese Army headquarters in Tokyo that it was possible to gain temporary air superiority and wage the decisive battle for the Philippines on Leyte rather than waiting for the Americans to attack Luzon.<sup>142</sup> The first reinforcements began arriving at Ormoc from other islands in the southern Philippines on October 23, and by the end of the month over 6,000 men from two Japanese divisions had been unloaded. Although still able to break the Japanese codes, allied intercept operators and intelligence officers during this period were focused more on deciphering the actions of the Japanese battle fleet during the battle of Leyte Gulf than monitoring small ship movements, and attacks on these convoys, usually by American naval aircraft, were the result of presence in the right location, not good intelligence.<sup>143</sup> As more and more reinforcements began arriving, and the outline of Japanese intentions became clearer, ULTRA intercepts often, but not always, provided a clear picture of when and where the convoys were moving.<sup>144</sup>

On the afternoon of November 1, 1944, a large convoy arrived at Ormoc carrying the veteran, well-trained First Division from Manchuria. There had been no ULTRA warnings, and Japanese deception efforts help keep most of Halsey's carriers away from the area. The four merchant ships and their escorts were picked up by a B-24 and strafed by several P-38s, but none of the ships suffered any serious damage.

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<sup>142</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:369-370; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA p. 168.

<sup>143</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:380-381, 405; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 167-168.

<sup>144</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 175-176; Bleakley, pp. 186-187.

The convoy was attacked again the next day by 24 B-24s and one vessel went down, but all of the 12,000 soldiers and ninety percent of their equipment had already been unloaded.<sup>145</sup> In this situation, Kenney was not only handicapped by a lack of advanced information, but also by the tactical situation. He had few of his aircraft on Leyte, and was unable to base any bombers on the island. The P-38s could carry bombs, and the pilots were trained to drop them, but there were usually too few aircraft and too many conflicting demands. To Kenney's mind, taking control of the air claimed first priority and, on November 2, for example, only eight P-38s were available for strikes against this convoy.<sup>146</sup> The transfer of the First Division was significant. The Japanese claimed the operation was the "most successful major reinforcement of the Leyte campaign," while Krueger believed "this unit, more than any other hostile unit on Leyte, was responsible for the extension of the Leyte Operation."<sup>147</sup>

The First Division convoy, however, was the last big reinforcement made to Leyte. A variety of intelligence sources confirmed the fact that the Japanese planned on continuing their reinforcements to Leyte, and intelligence officers began using information from intercepted messages to pinpoint the location of the convoys.

Beginning with a convoy on November 7 and continuing through November and

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<sup>145</sup> Lieutenant Commander Noriteru Yatsui, 7th Escort Convoy, Imperial Japanese Navy, October 26, 1945, in Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 1:163; Craven and Cate, 5:377; MacArthur Reports, 2:408; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 169. Kenney relied on reports by the P-38 pilots and gave more impressive results. He claimed that the attacks accounted for three ships being sunk during this period, Kenney, Reports, pp. 473-474.

<sup>146</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 473; AEB, "Leyte," p. 2; Sixth Army, "Report of the Leyte Operation," p. 43, COE X, 54, 6.

<sup>147</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:408; Sixth Army, p. 41, quoted in Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 169.

December, allied aircraft, along with submarines further out to sea, blockaded Leyte.<sup>148</sup>

Knowing what was happening and doing something about it, however, were two different things and Kenney was still handicapped by a lack of aircraft. On occasion, he was even forced to ask Halsey for help in stopping the convoys. On November 10, an intercepted radio message revealed that a Japanese convoy was due at Ormoc at 8 o'clock the next morning. Halsey's carriers had completed strikes on Japanese air bases on Luzon, and Kenney asked if Halsey could attack the ships before they unloaded. Although Kenney made the request grudgingly, he realized that it was necessary because his aircraft, flying from bases further away, simply could not make it to Ormoc before the convoy was unloaded. Kenney's comment also sheds some light on one of the reasons behind the service tensions, publicity and public recognition. "Let him [Halsey] have the headline if he will stop the reinforcement," Kenney remarked.<sup>149</sup> The decision turned out to be a fortunate one in many respects. Not only did Halsey's attack utterly destroy the convoy, but bad weather at Morotai prevented Kenney's aircraft from taking off.<sup>150</sup> Although eventually able to stop the Japanese from sending troops and supplies to Leyte, the damage had been done. In the first two weeks the Japanese sent 22,000 troops, double the original strength on Leyte, into

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<sup>148</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 174- 178.

<sup>149</sup> Kenney diary, November 10, 1944, KP.

<sup>150</sup> Yatsui, in Interrogations, 1:163; Kenney diary, November 11, 1944, KP. In his memoir Kenney stressed the weather considerations, not the distance from the air fields to the targets, as the reason Halsey hit the convoy. Kenney, Reports, p. 476.

Ormoc and by the end of the fighting, about 35,000 soldiers fought on Leyte as reinforcements.<sup>151</sup>

Participants of the Leyte fighting and historians since have realized that problems in building airfields had a negative effect on the course of the war. Not only did the failure increase the number of casualties in the Leyte campaign, but it also delayed the attack on Luzon and possibly lengthened the war. Few historians or participants, however, have seen past the difficulties in building airfields to the more general problem of forfeiting air superiority. General Krueger, for example, has been criticized for the slow pace of the campaign; his position is easier to understand within the context of what he knew at the time.<sup>152</sup> As historian Edward Drea pointed out, the indications that Krueger received were ambiguous and even as late as November 8, Krueger's intelligence officer was worried about landings at Carigara Bay.<sup>153</sup> In addition, Krueger was used to fighting with almost total air superiority and was now thrust into an environment in which the situation was, at best, neutral. This situation not only allowed the Japanese to ship additional reinforcements into Ormoc, but also presented the very real possibility of a landing force at Carigara Bay. The threat of such a move on his exposed right flank gave Krueger pause and explained, in part, his decision to consolidate his position resulting in slow progress in finishing the Leyte

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<sup>151</sup> 10th Information and Historical Service, p. 9; Cannon, p. 26. The numbers for how many troops landed vary. The official histories all use 45,000, Craven and Cate, 5:377; Cannon, p. 102; Morison, 12:351. Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 178, states that 38,000 left for Leyte, but 3,250 were lost enroute.

<sup>152</sup> Spector, Eagle, pp. 513-514.

<sup>153</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 169-172; Canon, pp. 209-210.

campaign.<sup>154</sup> In previous operations, Krueger might have turned to Kenney for help. Kenney could have covered the open flank through the air by using reconnaissance aircraft to watch for ships heading for a landing while air support aircraft waited on alert to attack the landing force before it hit Krueger's flank. On Leyte in late 1944 this option was unavailable. The lack of bases and the presence of hostile air forces meant that no reconnaissance aircraft could be brought forward. The first close air support mission, by Kenney's P-40s, was not flown until the end of November and even then the number of such missions eventually flown was small.<sup>155</sup> In short, the inability to gain control of the air was a key component in Krueger's decision-making process.

Explanations, by both participants and historians, about the failure to bring more aircraft into Leyte tend to focus on poor terrain intelligence about Leyte or the engineering problems involved in building the airfields, but these interpretations are only part of the story.<sup>156</sup> The long-time American presence in the Philippines provided some knowledge of the country. MacArthur himself had spent two weeks on Leyte in 1903 surveying in Tacloban, the capital of the province, and American forces had used a small commercial airstrip built near the same area.<sup>157</sup> The Japanese had reportedly

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<sup>154</sup> William M. Leary, "Walter Krueger, MacArthur's Fighting General," in Leary, p. 74; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 171.

<sup>155</sup> Kenney diary, November 30, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:384; Boggs, p. 32.

<sup>156</sup> Krueger, pp. 194-195; Spector, Eagle, pp. 511, 517; Stanley L. Falk, "Douglas MacArthur and the War Against Japan," in Leary, p. 17; Weinberg, p. 849.

<sup>157</sup> Carol Morris Petillo, Douglas MacArthur. The Philippine Years (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 68-69; Colonel Ray T. Elsmore, "Report on Philippine Island Airfields," February 2, 1942, file 730.934-1; Allied Geographical Section, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific, "Terrain Study Number 84 Leyte Province," August 17, 1944, p. 51, Willoughby Papers, MHI.

lengthened this same airstrip at Tacloban and made other improvements; and although the runway was not concrete or covered with any sort of paved surface, it was considered an all-weather surface because, according to several studies, "the rain packs the sandy soil and makes it even firmer than when dry."<sup>158</sup>

Other than this limited amount of information known about the airfield at Tacloban, however, there was little information available that would help an engineer make a decision about building an airfield. The decision to attack at Leyte without capturing any intervening bases put the area out of range of the reconnaissance aircraft until the beginning of October.<sup>159</sup> Once the aircraft were in position to fly to Leyte, bad weather limited the number of photographs that could be taken, as did a request from the navy to limit the number of friendly aircraft flights over Leyte out of fear that the aircraft might be attacked by American forces.<sup>160</sup> In sum, there was a definite lack of the appropriate kind of photographs needed to adequately plan for building airfields. Ground reconnaissance reports in the past had proven enormously helpful in making decisions about where an airfield could be built and there were plenty of friendly agents on the island that could provide information on the terrain. Although MacArthur's headquarters received numerous reports, most dealt with how many

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<sup>158</sup> "Terrain Study 84," p. 51; Allied Geographical Section, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific, "Special Report Number 55, Airfields, Landing Beaches, and Roads, Samar, Leyte, and Dinagat Groups," July 10, 1944, file 706.610H-55 HRA; Allied Geographical Section, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, "Terrain Handbook 34, Tacloban (Philippine Series), September 25, 1944, Sutherland Papers, Box 25.

<sup>159</sup> Engineers, 3:93, fn. 16; 6:286.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

troops the Japanese had on the island and where they were located. From the perspective of an engineer assigned the task of planning runways, these reports were disappointing. While the agents were able to provide general information about the terrain, they were neither trained nor equipped to provide an assessment of the soil that was so important.<sup>161</sup> Although advanced teams from Sixth Army were sent in prior to other invasions in New Guinea, and might have been used on Leyte to investigate the terrain, the extensive guerrilla organization on the island probably persuaded the commanders that scouting operations were unnecessary.<sup>162</sup>

While the lack of aerial photographs and reports on the terrain, which aviation engineers found "faulty and considerably exaggerated,"<sup>163</sup> caused some problems during the planning for the invasion of Leyte, engineers had enough information in advance to forecast the general kinds of problems they would encounter on Leyte. Colonel William J. Ely, the second-highest ranking engineer in the Sixth Army and the liaison officer to MacArthur's headquarters, analyzed the problems on Leyte accurately. Ely opposed both the scale of the engineering projects and timing of the invasion because there were too many construction requirements and too few engineers scheduled for the invasion and the timing of the attack put it during a period when heavy rains and typhoons were possible. In addition, he pointed out that the soil in the Leyte Valley, where three of the airfields were supposed to be built, was ill-suited for

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<sup>161</sup> Ind, p. 115-241 for the activities of agents in the Philippines. MacArthur Reports, 2: 311-312.

<sup>162</sup> Sixth Army, pp. 201-202.

<sup>163</sup> Fifth Air Force Aviation Engineers, "Leyte Report," p. 2, file 730.935-6 HRA.



runways and would require large amount of additional work to make them suitable. His recommendation was to add more engineers to the operation, change the proposed landing site to another island, or reduce the size of the requirements. Despite support from Sixth Army, Ely's recommendations were overlooked at MacArthur's headquarters.<sup>164</sup>

The concerns of the engineers were downplayed largely because no one in a high command position expected the air and sea fight that the Japanese put forth on Leyte. While the Japanese had always put up stiff resistance in ground battles, the reaction from the air and sea forces had been more predictable. The success of previous operations had confirmed to Kenney the weakness of the Japanese and given him confidence that he and his forces could handle any possible contingency. Kenney told Arnold that the whole plan was "unsound" unless the Japanese air and naval forces were "reduced so far that they could be of little more than nuisance value."<sup>165</sup>

Kenney's support for the invasion makes it clear that he never expected such a stiff and prolonged reaction to the landing on Leyte. Similarly, Admiral Barbey wrote a fellow officer that Japanese efforts in defending Leyte were "more determined . . . than had been anticipated."<sup>166</sup> The confidence about the Japanese probably made it easy to dismiss or downplay concerns about construction and also left Kenney and the other commanders unprepared to deal with the Japanese air reaction they did encounter.

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<sup>164</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 3," p. 19; Canon, pp. 35-37; Leary, p. 72.

<sup>165</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, KP.

<sup>166</sup> Letter, Barbey to Admiral Jacobs, quoted in Barbey, p. 279.

Among the air commanders, both army and navy, there was also no recognition that the air battle for the Philippines would be fundamentally different from any other invasion. Although ground combat in the Central Pacific differed in many ways from fighting in the jungles of the Southwest Pacific, air warfare in both areas had been essentially the same.<sup>167</sup> On the small islands dotting the Central Pacific and the garrison areas of the Southwest Pacific there was a limited number of airfields and the distances over which the Japanese would have to send reinforcements were very long, making it difficult to rush in large numbers of aircraft. Thus, in an amphibious assault on an island in the Central Pacific, it was relatively easy for aircraft from the carriers to provide the air support needed and at the same time protect the landing force from the Japanese fleet. In Kenney's theater he only had to keep track of a few airfields that could threaten MacArthur's operations and had excellent intelligence when reinforcements were being flown in or staged forward for an attack. As Kenney explained to Arnold nearly two years before Leyte:

In the Pacific theater we have a number of islands garrisoned by small forces. These islands are nothing more or less than aerodromes or aerodrome areas from which modern fire-power is launched. Sometimes they are true islands like Wake or Midway, sometimes they are localities on large land masses. Port Moresby, Lae and Buna are all on the island of New Guinea, but the only practicable way to go from one to the other is by air or by water: they are all islands as far as warfare is concerned.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> For differences in ground fighting see Weinberg, p. 647.

<sup>168</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 24, 1942, quoted in Craven and Cate, 4:119.

The air battle in the Philippines differed. There were many more airfields in the Philippines than there were in New Guinea or any of the areas in the Central Pacific. For example, at Wewak the Japanese had built four airfields, at Hollandia three, and even the largest Japanese base in the Southwest Pacific, Rabaul, only had five airfields. In contrast, there were around 70 airstrips on Luzon and about 50 more in the central and southern Philippine islands, allowing the Japanese to effectively disperse their aircraft and making it extremely difficult to destroy all of the planes on the ground.<sup>169</sup> In addition, the air lanes between Japan and the Philippines were relatively short and it was both possible and practical to rapidly reinforce the air forces in the fighting. Both the increased number of airfields and the ability to send in more aircraft made the air battle in the Philippines different from previous experiences, but none of the air commanders, Kenney included, seemed to anticipate this difference or believed that it would have any impact. The combination of confidence that the Japanese air arm was largely defeated and the lack of awareness of the differences in the conditions of air warfare in the Philippines made the commanders willing to overlook the problems in airfield construction identified by the engineers.

Once ashore a variety of factors stymied the engineers' efforts, and estimates of the Japanese reactions proved inaccurate. The unloading of the LSTs on the Tacloban airfield, caused by using a beach with a sandbar and the failure to have pontoon causeways in the proper position, resulted in at least a two-day delay in repairing the field. Other delays were caused by an inability to get the steel landing mats to the

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<sup>169</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, p. 17.

airfields.<sup>170</sup> Rather than being readily available, the landing mats were stowed deep in the freighters because the convoy had originally been loaded for a different type of operation. On Yap, the original destination, coral provided plenty of support for aircraft and the steel landing mats were not critical to building the airfields. The rapid change from Yap to Leyte resulted in too little time in which to unload and reload the ships, and that caused more problems for the engineers.<sup>171</sup> As Ely predicted, the heavy rainfall during October and November, three typhoons and twice the normal amount, exacerbated the problems in construction. Tasks had to be repeated and many engineers had to be pulled off of the airdromes and put on road construction in order to get equipment to where it was needed.<sup>172</sup>

The problems in building the airfields and the difficulties caused by the robust Japanese air response highlighted problems in the planning for air support of the invasion and the inability of the Army and Navy air commanders to meld their forces together. Despite the comments by some officers, including Willoughby, MacArthur's intelligence chief, and Admiral Barbey, the amphibious commander in the southwest Pacific, that Kenney took over control of air operations too soon, there was, in fact, no other option.<sup>173</sup> The escort carriers had to be withdrawn and Halsey was not anxious to tie up the carrier task forces in an area where they could be pounded by suicide

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<sup>170</sup> Sturgis, "Engineer Operations, Part 2," p. 514; Engineers, 6:291.

<sup>171</sup> Put 'em Across, p. 109; Engineers, 6:283-287; Casey, pp. 224-226.

<sup>172</sup> Sixth Army, p. 43; Casey, p. 228; Engineers, 3:142.

<sup>173</sup> Barbey, p. 279; Luvaas, Dear Miss 'Em, pp. 166-167.

bombers.<sup>174</sup> During the planning for the invasion there had been no firm date set at which Kenney would take over air operations, although it was probably assumed that it would occur within five days as that was the target date for the first airfield. Instead, the directive called for Kenney to assume air support duties "at the earliest practicable date after the establishment of fighters and light bombers in the Leyte area" and would occur when both Kenney and Kinkaid agreed. The directive for the invasion also gave air control over the invasion area either to Kenney or Kinkaid, but did not allow them to control the other's air units for even brief periods of time.<sup>175</sup> There had been no planning for the contingency that the commanders actually faced in October 1944: some of the airfields open, but not as many as anticipated; a strong enemy air reaction; and difficulty in keeping the carriers close by.

One possible alternative would have been for Kenney and Kinkaid to combine their forces together into a more potent combination. Unfortunately, there was no procedure at the time for integrating the air units and the lack of coordination between the land-based aircraft and the carriers was clearly evident during the invasion of Leyte. Some of the problems were small and easily resolved. The marine night fighter pilots on Leyte were initially confused by procedures used by the Army ground controllers, but the mix-ups were alleviated through practice.<sup>176</sup> Other problems were not so easily resolved. Kenney's aircraft were charged with patrolling and defending

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<sup>174</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, p. 4, KP.

<sup>175</sup> General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area, Operations Instructions Number 70, September 21, 1944, reprinted in Cannon, Appendix A.

<sup>176</sup> Boggs, p. 32.

the westward approaches to Leyte, through which the Japanese fleet passed before the battle of Leyte Gulf, and while they did spot some of the fleet they were not used to attack the ships.<sup>177</sup> Whitehead suspected that this was a deliberate move by the Navy to gain all of the publicity in sinking the Japanese fleet.<sup>178</sup> Some of Kenney's bombers on Morotai attempted to go after the ships as they left the Leyte area, but a combination of poor bombing and bad intelligence made the efforts ineffective. Only one light cruiser, which had already been heavily damaged in the sea battle, was sunk.<sup>179</sup>

Solutions to the problems of combining air operations were not abundant in 1944. Admiral Kinkaid suggested placing all of the air reconnaissance and land-based aircraft that would be used in any way during the operation under the control of the naval commander. While this arrangement would allow the naval commander to determine the search areas and coordinate attacks with surface units, it was hardly likely to gain support from officers like Kenney.<sup>180</sup> Some naval officers, in fact, saw Kenney as the problem. The commander of the carrier task force, Vice Admiral John S. McCain, told Kinkaid that the aircraft from the escort carriers should have been put on land along with some Marine squadrons. The problem, McCain argued, was that,

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<sup>177</sup> Morison, 12:190-191.

<sup>178</sup> Goldstein, "Aerospace Pioneer," pp. 221-223;.

<sup>179</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:366-368; Morison, 12:238-239, 311.

<sup>180</sup> Commander Central Philippines Attack Force (Commander Task Force 77, Commander Seventh Fleet), to Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, "Report of Operation for the Capture of Leyte Island and Action Report of Engagements in Surigao Strait and off Samar Island on October 25, 1944-(King Two Operation)," January 31, 1945, p. 55, Kinkaid Papers box 8.

"The Army don't [sic] understand the sea. They don't understand search and strike. They don't know how to defend ships. They are cocky, courageous and will try anything once, but their higher-ups [Kenney] do not have the know how."<sup>181</sup> McCain urged Kinkaid to go around Kenney on questions about using naval aircraft and talk directly to MacArthur. Kenney, McCain believed, "has a closed mind on the subject."<sup>182</sup>

As he had throughout the war, Kenney had little use for the complaints or suggestions of naval officers and made few attempts to get along with them or work together. Although on occasion Kenney requested Halsey's help in attacking the airfields on Luzon and in sinking the convoy's off of Ormoc, those cases were the exception, not the rule. If Halsey's comments after the fact were any indication, he probably made his dissatisfaction with Kenney's requests quite clear. In any case, there were few, if any, attempts to define what targets had the highest priority or combine the efforts of the two services.

The most divisive fights between Kinkaid and Kenney came in late November over protection of the ships in Leyte Gulf. During refueling operations on November 27, suicide bombers hit a battleship and destroyer, prompting Kinkaid to complain that the aircraft assigned to protect the ships were nowhere in sight. Kenney retorted that there were aircraft in the air, but that they could not get close enough to the ships to

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<sup>181</sup> Letter, John S. McCain to Kinkaid, November 27, 1944, Thomas C. Kinkaid Papers, Box 17, Naval Historical Center.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

attack the Japanese bombers because of the anti-aircraft fire.<sup>183</sup> Two days later another battleship and destroyer were hit and on board the Maryland, 31 men were killed and another 30 injured.<sup>184</sup> Upset with the growing list of casualties, Kinkaid accused Kenney of not fulfilling his obligations.<sup>185</sup> At the same time Kenney was also under intense pressure. Air operations during the Leyte operation had not gone at all the way he had planned. Japanese air reinforcements continued to arrive in large numbers and he still only had a little over 100 aircraft (the compliment of one of the large aircraft carriers) to deal with a variety of tasks.<sup>186</sup> Kenney grew enraged by Kinkaid's comments and told the Naval Commander "to put that in writing and I would then prefer charges against him for false official statements,"<sup>187</sup> harsh words for two men who were supposed to be working together. Both Kenney and Kinkaid blamed each other for the problems, but both bore some of the responsibility. An investigation afterwards revealed that the attack on November 27 came from a spot with no radar coverage, hiding the enemy aircraft until very late, which meant that the aircraft could not intercept the Japanese aircraft before they attacked the ships. Delays in intercepting the next attack were attributed to problems in relaying the information from the ships to the P-38s. In addition, the report pointed out a variety of problems and blamed the failure to intercept the attack on a lack of awareness on the part of the

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<sup>183</sup> Kenney diary, November 27, 28, 1944, KP; Morison, 12:366.

<sup>184</sup> Morison, 12:367.

<sup>185</sup> Kenney diary, November 29, 30, 1944, KP.

<sup>186</sup> MacArthur Reports, 2:418; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 63.

<sup>187</sup> Kenney diary, November 30, 1944, KP.



ground controllers, an inability of different radar sites, both on sea and on land, to work together, and poor radio discipline.<sup>188</sup>

The fighting on Leyte continued through November and into December. An amphibious landing near Ormoc by the Americans in early December, however, effectively sealed off the island from more reinforcements and surrounded the Japanese forces on the island. The air strength on Leyte continued to grow and by the end of December there were almost 350 aircraft on the island.<sup>189</sup> The landing on Mindoro on December 15 cut off Leyte even further and by the end of December most of the heavy fighting was over. Eighth Army, and Thirteenth Air Force, took over control of operations on December 26, while Sixth Army and Fifth Air Force prepared for the invasion of Luzon. While Whitehead was in charge of operations on Leyte during most of the operation, Kenney kept tabs on what was going on and was the one responsible for dealing with the naval commanders. In addition, Kenney concentrated on planning for the invasion of Mindoro scheduled for December and MacArthur's return to the island of Luzon.

In assessing the results of the invasion of Leyte, Kenney downplayed the problems caused by the Japanese and, instead, stressed what they might have done. His attitude towards the entire event was that "The Jap missed an opportunity to give

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<sup>188</sup> Letter, Commander Allied Naval Forces SWPA, to Commander Allied Air Forces SWPA, "Information Concerning air attacks on surface ships in Leyte Gulf, November 27 and 29, 1944, December 9, 1944, Kinkaid Papers, Box 8.

<sup>189</sup> Cannon, pp. 275-293; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 63.

us a bloody nose,"<sup>190</sup> and things would have been much worse if not for "His naval dumbness, his wretched gunnery, his stupid handling of his air forces and his incredibly inaccurate bombing."<sup>191</sup> Kenney was convinced that even though the Japanese could not have won the war, they could have caused serious trouble and perhaps prevailed on Leyte if they had pressed their attack harder.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the overwhelming lesson for Kenney was the value and importance of land-based aircraft. "Carrier-based aircraft, even in the overwhelming numbers we are using, do not supply the answer for air cover and support," Kenney concluded.<sup>192</sup> "The main lesson I believe we should draw from this operation is to stick to land-based support whenever we attempt an amphibious expedition against a hostile shore."<sup>193</sup>

## Conclusion

The return to the Philippines had not been a smooth journey. The pattern of operations Kenney had used during the first two years of war had changed. The introduction of aircraft carriers beginning with the invasion of Hollandia meant that MacArthur could now advance without seizing nearby air bases. While Kenney still carried out many of the familiar roles with his aircraft, he now had to integrate operations with aircraft carriers. For the most part the air commanders cooperated by

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<sup>190</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, p. 1, KP.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

separating the air space geographically. Although there were no complications when this was tried in Hollandia, the differences in the conditions of the fighting in Leyte produced problems. The fighting on Leyte made it clear that the war was far from over. Not only was the invasion of Luzon ahead, but it appeared that the worst fighting would occur when the home islands of Japan were invaded.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Luzon and Beyond, January to August 1945**

**"We can not take another chance like Leyte,"<sup>1</sup>**

During much of the fighting on Leyte, Kenney entrusted Whitehead with the detailed decisions about daily missions and operations. Kenney, of course, kept abreast with the daily operations, but was much more involved in overseeing the planning for future operations. MacArthur's original scheme was to conquer Leyte rapidly, then move northwards to Luzon which would then serve as the launching point for the invasion of Japan.

First, MacArthur had to make his way northward through the Philippines. The next step was to invade Mindoro, scheduled for December 5, and then assault Luzon, on December 20. Kenney returned to Hollandia in late October, 1944, to review plans for upcoming invasions. The events he witnessed on Leyte fresh on his mind.

Although still convinced that the Japanese could not win the war, the initiation of the large-sized suicide attacks, the persistence of the air raids, and the reinforcements into

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<sup>1</sup> Kenney diary, October 29, 1944, KP.

Leyte made Kenney more cautious. "We can not take another chance like Leyte," he told his staff, vowing that, "Landbased air must support the next operation."<sup>2</sup>

The campaign on Leyte convinced Kenney that his planners had underestimated the number of aircraft needed for the invasions of Mindoro and Luzon.<sup>3</sup> He told Sutherland and Chamberlin that he needed a minimum of two heavy bomb groups, three groups of medium bombers, and three fighter groups in Leyte for the Mindoro invasion, plus the use of Halsey's carriers against Japanese airfields on Formosa and Luzon. For the invasion of Luzon, Kenney wanted an additional two fighter groups, four or five bomber groups, and more help from Halsey against Formosa, which was within range of the landing beaches on Luzon. Assembling this large of an air fleet and shipping all the required people and equipment to conduct flying operations would take time. Given the delays already incurred in building the Leyte airfields, Kenney recommended moving the date of the Mindoro invasion from December 5 to December 15 or 20 and delaying the attack on Luzon until early January.<sup>4</sup> Although Sutherland agreed with Kenney, neither was anxious to tell MacArthur about the need to postpone the invasions; both knew that MacArthur wanted to proceed as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Eventually, of course, MacArthur would have to be informed about the problems in attacking Mindoro. When Kenney returned to Leyte on November 10, the

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<sup>2</sup> Kenney diary, October 29, 1944. Also, Letter Kenney to Arnold, November 14, 1944, KP; Letter Kenney to Arnold, December 28, 1944, Wilson papers.

<sup>3</sup> Kenney diary, October 29, 1944, KP.

<sup>4</sup> Kenney diary, November 2, 1944, KP.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

fighting on the island was still not progressing as quickly as planned and the Japanese continued to pour reinforcements into Ormoc. Sutherland and Kenney met with MacArthur to discuss the plans for Mindoro and Luzon, a session Kenney termed "a real brawl."<sup>6</sup> MacArthur refused to listen to any suggestions about delaying the invasions.

Despite the rejection, Kenney and others continued to work on MacArthur and convince him that the original dates for Mindoro and Luzon were just not feasible. Not only would the airfields on Leyte not be ready in time, but the shipping needed for the invasion force would be tied up if Krueger's plan for a landing at Ormoc was accepted. In addition, the aircraft carriers had been in operations almost continuously and badly needed a break from combat.<sup>7</sup> Whitehead, overseeing operations on Leyte, updated Kenney on the pace of construction and became convinced that by the scheduled date for Mindoro he would only have four fighter groups and one medium bomber group on Leyte, a number far below what Kenney considered necessary. Whitehead also met with MacArthur and relayed the information about the construction and its effect on bringing forward more aircraft. Whitehead recommended using some of the escort carriers to cover the convoy if MacArthur stuck with the original date. Although very "disappointed" with Whitehead's estimates, MacArthur planned to go ahead with the invasion on December 5.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> November 10, 1944, KP. Kenney almost totally ignores the discussions about plans for the invasions after Leyte in his book; see Kenney, Reports, Chapter 22.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Ross Smith, Triumph in the Philippines (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1963), pp. 23-25.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, November 18, 1944, p. 2, Whitehead Papers.

MacArthur already knew that he would not have the use of any carriers.

Admiral Kinkaid and Admiral Nimitz told MacArthur, shortly before Whitehead's meeting, that Halsey's carrier task groups would not be able to stay around indefinitely and provide air cover. While Nimitz understood the situation and was sympathetic, he told MacArthur that Halsey's carriers and men needed two weeks of rest before they would be ready for the Mindoro invasion. In addition, Kinkaid was reluctant to put his escort carriers close to the Japanese air bases given the strength of the air attacks.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the almost unanimous urgings for delay, MacArthur would not budge. Kenney continued to work out plans for the Mindoro and Luzon attacks and returned to Leyte for a planning conference on November 26. Before the formal meeting, Kenney met with MacArthur privately and lobbied for a delay of ten days. If MacArthur would not agree, then Kenney could not promise that he would have enough fighters available and Kinkaid would have to use the escort carriers to protect the invasion convoy. MacArthur remained obstinate, and Kenney's continued comments on the delay, which he promised to bring up at the planning conference, made MacArthur "sore as hell." The airman held his ground, however, and asked MacArthur "if he wanted me to yes him or give him my best professional advice on air matters." Probably because of their long association through the war and MacArthur's trust in Kenney's judgments about air operations, MacArthur did not throw Kenney out, but

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<sup>9</sup> Wheeler, pp. 408-409.

told him to "tell . . . the truth as I saw it and not to mind if he did get excited once in awhile." <sup>10</sup>

On November 26, 1944, the top commanders met to discuss air operations for the invasion of Mindoro on December 5. The kamikaze threat remained as frightful as ever. The day prior to the meeting, suicide raiders slammed Halsey's big carriers which had been attacking the airfields on Luzon. The Japanese sank one carrier along with several other vessels, forcing the Americans to withdraw. Despite his earlier promise to bring up the ten-day delay during the meeting, Kenney evidently decided that a public confrontation with MacArthur over a postponement would have not done any good and might have ruined his relationship with the theater commander. Instead, he turned his anger on the Navy. He blasted their refusal to risk the escort carriers with the convoy or send the escort carriers to relieve Kenney's aircraft in defending Leyte so that the latter could be used to cover the convoy. From Kenney's perspective the discussions turned into another "brawl," brought on in no small way by Kenney's intemperate remarks to Kinkaid about the Navy's fear of losing the escort carriers. <sup>11</sup> After much discussion, Kinkaid, under intense pressure and against his better judgment, agreed to use six escort carriers, along with his small fleet of old battleships, destroyers, and cruisers, to accompany the convoy on December 5. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kenney diary, November 24, 1944, KP.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney diary, November 26, 1944, KP.

<sup>12</sup> Kenney diary, November 26, 1944, KP; Wheeler, p. 410.



The naval commander almost immediately began having second thoughts about the risks involved with sending ships into such an environment, and over the next couple of days the commanders of the various task forces urged Kinkaid to reconsider the situation in light of the ferocious Japanese air attacks.<sup>13</sup> During refueling operations on November 27, 25 to 30 Japanese aircraft attacked one of Kinkaid's task groups, damaging a battleship and two cruisers. Near sunset two days later, the same task group was hit, severely damaging the battleship Maryland.<sup>14</sup> Kinkaid was growing more and more exasperated with the persistent attacks and grumbled about Kenney's air protection. Although at one point Kenney privately admitted that he did not understand why his aircraft could not stop the suicide attacks, he was decidedly unsympathetic toward Kinkaid, telling the admiral at one point to put his complaints in writing so that Kenney could file charges for making a false official statement.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps if they had worked together the two men could have convinced MacArthur about the danger from the Japanese attacks on the shipping for the Mindoro invasion, but the frayed nerves of the commanders since the invasion of Leyte, Kenney's tactless comments, and the tensions between the services made this level of cooperation almost impossible.

Kinkaid set out to change MacArthur's mind about delaying the invasion of Mindoro and Luzon without Kenney's help. On the evening of November 30, Kinkaid

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<sup>13</sup> Wheeler, pp. 410-411.

<sup>14</sup> Morison, 12:366-367.

<sup>15</sup> Kenney diary, November 29, 30, 1944, KP.

resumed his argument about risks involved in sending the escort carriers to Mindoro and bolstered his case by producing a message from Nimitz urging a delay of ten days. Kinkaid also hinted that he was obliged to tell Admiral King in Washington about his reservations, which, as Kenney recalled, made "MacArthur hit the roof."<sup>16</sup> That same evening Halsey also sent word that he would like to postpone the attack on Mindoro. MacArthur finally gave in and set the new date for Mindoro to December 15 and scheduled the attack on Luzon for January 9, 1945.<sup>17</sup>

The delay not only freed amphibious vessels for Krueger's attack on Ormoc, but also allowed more time for the construction of an additional airfield on Leyte, which Kenney desperately needed if he was going to support the invasion of Mindoro.<sup>18</sup> The air plan for the upcoming invasion focused almost entirely on stopping the suicide attacks on the convoy. Aircraft in Thirteenth Air Force and the RAAF Command would hit airfields in Borneo and the Celebes to prevent any reinforcements from the southern area. Carriers would have responsibility for striking the airfields on Luzon north of Manila Bay, while Kenney's aircraft could hit any target in the Philippines south of Manila. Whitehead's Fifth Air Force would cover the convoy at dusk and the shipping in the Mindanao Sea, while aircraft from the escort carriers would be over the

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<sup>16</sup> Kenney diary, November 30, 1944, KP.

<sup>17</sup> Wheeler, pp. 412-413; Kenney diary, November 30, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:395; Morison, 12:6-9; Smith, Triumph, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Engineers, 6:303.

convoy at all other times and provide any bombing on the beach the day of the invasion.<sup>19</sup>

Hopefully, the intricate and comprehensive air plan would protect the convoy against the Japanese air raids. Despite frequent attacks on the Japanese airfields, their air strength in the Philippines remained high. While the exact numbers varied from day to day, on December 9 the 4th Air Army had about 133 operational planes and the Japanese Navy an additional 100 or so flyable aircraft. On the day prior to the attack on Mindoro 150 more aircraft were sent from Formosa to the Philippines.<sup>20</sup> Although Kenney had more aircraft at his disposal, the airfield construction problems continued to restrict the number he could push into combat. When the invasion of Mindoro started, Kenney only had an average of 286 aircraft available on Leyte.<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, it did not look like the American soldiers would face much tough fighting once ashore. The Japanese did not consider Mindoro a likely landing spot because there were few locations for airfields, and left the defense of the island to fewer than 1,000 troops.<sup>22</sup>

Early on the morning of December 13, the invasion convoy for Mindoro assembled off the coast of Leyte and threaded its way westward under heavy air protection. Japanese reconnaissance aircraft spotted the convoy's departure and that afternoon ten attackers from an airfield on Cebu met the convoy as it approached the

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<sup>19</sup> Kenney diary, November 18, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:393-394; Morison, 12:21-22.

<sup>20</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:441-442; Morison, 12:14-15.

<sup>21</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:434; Craven and Cate, 5:394; Morison, 12:21.

southern tip of the island of Negro. Despite the efforts at defending the American ships a Japanese bomber slammed into the cruiser Nashville killing 175, including the commander of the air task force, Colonel Jack Murtha, and wounding 100 more.<sup>23</sup>

Halsey's continued assaults on the Japanese airfields on Luzon reduced the number of aircraft taking off to attack the convoy. Kenney's forces likewise stymied the Japanese air forces on the southern islands, yet it appeared that nothing could stop the Japanese attacks totally. The next day Japanese aircraft flew almost 70 missions, more than half of them suicide attacks, against the convoy bound for Mindoro. They flew an additional 13 sorties the day after.<sup>24</sup> Although the attackers failed to stop the landing, they did sink two LSTs and a small tanker, and damaged several more ships.<sup>25</sup> Nor did the attacks stop once the troops were ashore. From December 16 until January 5, when ships began heading towards Luzon, the Japanese flew over 300 missions, about half of them kamikaze attacks, against cargo ships near Mindoro or the airfields being built on the island.<sup>26</sup>

The actions of the Japanese ground forces on Mindoro did not match the ferocity of the air attacks. After the landing on December 15, the American forces quickly routed the outnumbered Japanese troops and by the middle of the afternoon engineers started construction of the first airfield.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the problems

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<sup>23</sup> Kenney diary, December 14, 15, 1944, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:396; Smith, Triumph, p. 46;

<sup>24</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:443-444.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444; Craven and Cate, 5:397; Smith, Triumph, pp. 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:449, fn. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, Triumph, pp. 48-49; Engineers, 6:315-316.

encountered on Leyte, Mindoro was, to Kenney, a "gold mine" for building airdromes.<sup>28</sup> The position of Mindoro in the Philippines archipelago, and a high central mountain range sheltered the southwestern corner of the island from the rainfall experienced on Leyte, greatly speeding the construction efforts.<sup>29</sup> Kenney planned on moving as many units as he could from Fifth Air Force into Mindoro where they would be in position for the invasion of Luzon. At the same time, Thirteenth Air Force units would be shipped to Leyte and work with Eighth Army. The RAAF Command would shift northward to Morotai.<sup>30</sup> Five days after the Mindoro landing Kenney moved in the first fighter group and by the end of December engineers had completed a second all-weather runway.<sup>31</sup>

The Japanese were not content to leave Mindoro alone, however. Hoping to slow down MacArthur's advance to Luzon, a surface task force of two cruisers and 6 destroyers steamed towards Mindoro to attack the supply ships off-shore and shell the forces on the island. There were few intelligence indications about the attack and the Japanese would have inflicted severe damage on the invasion force if a Navy reconnaissance pilot had not spotted the ships 180 miles west of the landing area at Mindoro late in the afternoon of December 26. Although Kinkaid formed a surface group to attack the Japanese force, it would not arrive from Leyte Gulf until the next

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<sup>28</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 28, 1944, KP.

<sup>29</sup> Engineers, 6:314.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, December 28, 1944, KP; Kenney, Reports, p. 521.

<sup>31</sup> Kenney, Reports p. 497; Smith, Triumph, pp. 48-49; Engineers, 6:315-316.

day. The defense of Mindoro rested on the 105 aircraft already on the island. The American crews had no training in night attacks, and no equipment to find or hit the ships accurately, yet made repeated attacks throughout the night. Although the Japanese only lost one destroyer in the running battle, the aircraft inflicted enough damage on the other ships to turn them back after some ineffective shelling of the island. The cost, however, was heavy; of the 105 aircraft that were on the island, 26 were lost. Some of the aircraft were downed by gunfire from the ships, but many more were put out of commission by damage caused from night landings under the Japanese shelling. Still others were unable to land on Mindoro and ran out of gas enroute to Leyte.<sup>32</sup>

Mindoro had been captured at remarkably low cost, and most of the damage continued to come from the Japanese air attacks. A total of three large Liberty ships, two carrying ammunition and fuel for aircraft, were sunk off the island and two LSTs, a destroyer, and several other landing craft were damaged. The airfields did not escape unscathed. On the night of January 2, 1945 a kamikaze attack destroyed 15 P-38s and 7 A-20s.<sup>33</sup> But the island proved an ideal location for Kenney's aircraft. By the time of the invasion of Luzon on January 9, five fighter groups, two bomber groups, and an assortment of other squadrons were flying from several airfields.<sup>34</sup> As MacArthur

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<sup>32</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:399; Reports of MacArthur, 2:449; Morison, 13:37-43; Smith, Triumph, pp. 49-51. Morison reported that the destroyer was actually sunk by a torpedo from a PT boat, but it had already been heavily damaged by the air attacks. Kenney, Reports, p. 499.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Triumph, pp. 51-52.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Triumph, p. 52.

moved northward to Luzon, it was apparent that the Japanese air threat had not disappeared and would remain one of Kenney's biggest headaches during the amphibious attack in Lingayen Gulf.

## **Luzon**

Much of the planning for Luzon occurred concurrently with the fighting on Leyte and the planning for the attack on Mindoro. Kenney was again immersed in the planning details, leaving the responsibility for on-going operations to his respective subordinate commanders: Whitehead at Fifth Air Force, Major General St. Clair Street with Thirteenth, and Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock with RAAF Command.<sup>35</sup> Kenney gave these commanders the freedom to develop their own tactics and techniques based on their individual situations; he assigned them a specific area of operations and provided the general missions, but did not interfere as long as they continued to produce results, as indicated by the number of airplanes shot down and ships sunk.<sup>36</sup> For the invasion of Luzon, Kenney again tapped Fifth Air Force as the air arm that would accompany Krueger's Sixth Army during its landing at the Lingayen Gulf and the drive south through the Cagayan Valley to Manila.<sup>37</sup> (Figure 5)

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<sup>35</sup> Kenney diary, January 1, 1945. KP.

<sup>36</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold. December 22, 1944, RG 4 MMMA.

<sup>37</sup> Clyde D. Eddleman, "The Lingayen Operation," Lecture presented at the Army and Navy Staff College, Washington, D. C., February 4, 1946, Eddleman Papers, MHI; Craven and Cate, 5:402-403, 405.

Figure 5--Luzon<sup>38</sup>



<sup>38</sup> Craven and Cate, 5: 417.



General Yamashita Tomoyuki, Krueger's adversary, had limited options for defending Luzon. He had no air support for protection or assistance and a large portion of his ground units had been chewed up on Leyte. Rather than repeat MacArthur's error in defending the beaches and retreating to the peninsula of Battan, Yamashita's plan was to delay Krueger and cause as many American casualties as possible. He divided his forces into three groups which enabled them to carry out a protracted defense of Luzon.<sup>39</sup> The Shobu group occupied the mountains northeast and east of the landing zone in the Lingayen Gulf, threatening Krueger's left flank as he advanced south towards Manila. In the mountains west of the airfield complex called Clark Field, 50 miles north of Manila, was the Kembu Group. Its primary purpose was to keep the airfields out of the Americans' hands for as long as possible and threaten Krueger's right flank. The Shimbu group, deployed in the high terrain of southern Luzon, east of Manila, controlled the reservoirs and water supply of Manila and threatened any American advance from the south. Although Yamashita could not count on air support for his ground operations, at the beginning of January about 150 aircraft remained on Luzon with 50 more scattered throughout the Philippines to contest the American landing.<sup>40</sup> In contrast with his optimism before Leyte, Kenney was anxious about the impending battle, convinced that the Japanese were "going to throw everything . . . into the defense of Luzon."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, pp. 518-519; Smith, *Triumph*, pp. 94-95; *Reports of MacArthur*, 2:450.

<sup>40</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, p. 519; Smith, *Triumph*, pp. 58-59, 95-97.

<sup>41</sup> Kenney diary, November 25, 1944, KP.

Planning discussions over the landing began back in November. As in the previous landing operations that combined carrier and land-based aircraft at Hollandia and Leyte, there was no centralized air command for Luzon; instead, roles and tasks were divided among a whole host of participants. Halsey's carrier task forces would attack the airfields on Formosa and in the Ryukyus Islands to cut off reinforcements coming to the Philippines. He would then sail south and strike airfields in northern Luzon, while B-29s based in the Marianas suppressed the reinforcements. Escort carriers under Kinkaid would cover the invasion force and provide air support for the ground troops on landing. The airfields at Mindoro brought Kenney's aircraft within 160 miles of Manila and allowed him to begin heavy attacks against the Japanese airfields in Luzon. Kenney's planes would remain south of the Lingayen Gulf and attack the airfields around Clark Field and Manila, isolate the landing area, and be ready to take over air operations from the escort carriers a week after the amphibious assault. Aircraft could cross the boundaries erected between the services, but only with the permission of the commander responsible for the area. The only procedures put in place to allow aircraft from the different services to work together was over the invasion beaches where they would fall under the control of Kinkaid's air officer.<sup>42</sup>

Rapid construction of the airfields on Luzon was critical. Kenney needed to take over responsibility for the air missions from the escort carriers a week after the

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<sup>42</sup> Kenney diary, November 25, 1944, KP; G-3, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, Conference Report, Subject: Coordination of Operations, November 5, 1944, Chamberlin Papers, MHI; USSBS, Fifth Air Force, pp. 36-37; Smith, Triumph, pp. 34-38. Kenney thought he had been assured that one of his officers would control air operations over the invasion area, but his proposal was never incorporated into the operational directive. Kenney diary, November 18, 1944, KP.

landing.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps chastened by the fiasco with the LSTs at Tacloban and other problems on Leyte, Kenney paid close attention to all aspects of the planning for the airfields. At a conference with the chief of staff and the operations officer for Sixth Army, Kenney extracted a promise that the supplies for the invasion force would be unloaded to the east of the landing beach and the planned airfield. In addition, he wanted the engineers who would stake out the runways and the steel runway matting they would need landed in the first wave of ships.<sup>44</sup>

The convoy for the invasion of Luzon departed from Leyte on January 2, 1945. The Japanese anticipated this move and as the ships sailed up the western side of Luzon the air attacks intensified. As the convoy neared Panay on January 4, an escort carrier was hit and sunk. The next day, despite far-ranging air attacks and the protection afforded by 50 to 60 American aircraft flying over the convoy, the Japanese struck hard. In a series of raids the Japanese damaged nine Allied ships, including two cruisers, two escort carriers, and three destroyers.<sup>45</sup> As bad as the kamikaze attacks had been so far, every soldier and sailor afloat braced for the worst as the naval task force entered the Lingayen Gulf on January 6, 1945. At the end of that terrifying day one mine sweeper had been sunk and sixteen more vessels were damaged, including the battleships New Mexico and California which were severely damaged. The attacks, inflicted by a surprisingly small number of aircraft, killed 170 men and wounded

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<sup>43</sup> Engineers, 6:325.

<sup>44</sup> Kenney diary, December 19, 1944, KP; Dod, p. 599

<sup>45</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:463, fn. 75; Morison, 13:98-106; Craven and Cate, 5:409; Smith, Triumph, p. 59.

another 500.<sup>46</sup> According to the Japanese, there were only 58 kamikaze aircraft and 17 escorts sent out that day; roughly one ship had been hit for every three and a half kamikaze aircraft lost.<sup>47</sup> The bravery of the Japanese pilots, the mountainous terrain surrounding the gulf which hid the Japanese aircraft from radar detection and delayed early warning of the attacks, and the tight quarters in the gulf which restricted the ability of the ships to maneuver against the attacks all added to the Japanese success.

American commanders reacted by filling the skies over Luzon. MacArthur asked Halsey to move his carriers south to assist Kenney in hitting the airfields around Clark and Manila. For his part, Kenney sent 120 aircraft over the Clark airfields at low altitude to shoot up and bomb anything that even looked like it could fly.<sup>48</sup>

Unsure of the location of the bases being used in the, MacArthur asked for an increase in the B-29 raids against Formosa and Okinawa to prevent any attacks from that area.<sup>49</sup>

Although this huge effort could not completely shut down the kamikaze attacks, it may have convinced the Japanese that they were quickly approaching the point of diminishing returns. In retrospect, January 6 proved to be the apex of the kamikaze effort during the Philippine campaign. The next day only 12 such missions were flown and on January 8, the Japanese began evacuating their aircraft from Luzon. Aircraft that could not be repaired enough to fly away were kept on the island to carry out the

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<sup>46</sup> Morison, 13:104-106; Craven and Cate, 5:409; Smith, Triumph, pp. 60-61.

<sup>47</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:465, fn. 79.

<sup>48</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:411-412; Morison, 13:106-107; Kenney, Reports, p. 501.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, Triumph, p. 678.

last kamikaze attacks on January 13, 1945.<sup>50</sup> On that same day Kenney's headquarters declared that the Japanese air units in the Philippines were no longer an "integral offensive force."<sup>51</sup>

Although the Japanese initiated kamikaze attacks out of desperation, and the nature of the attacks would dictate that they would eventually result in the total loss of every Japanese aircraft used, kamikaze missions proved far more effective than any other method of air attack, especially against ships. The first concentrated kamikaze attack during the invasion of Leyte cost the Japanese sixteen aircraft, but in return they sank one escort carrier and damaged six other ships. By comparison, conventional air attacks against Halsey's fleet prior to the Leyte invasion damaged just two American cruisers while the Japanese lost 126 aircraft.<sup>52</sup> During the entire Philippines campaign the Japanese Army launched 338 "special attack" or kamikaze flights and the Japanese Navy about 300 more, with impressive results. The suicide attacks sank at least 19 ships, including two escort carriers. The 121 hits and 53 near hits caused heavy damaged to 30 ships, with 37 more slightly damaged.<sup>53</sup> At a time when the chances of

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<sup>50</sup> Reports of MacArthur, 2:466, fn. 86 gives January 9 as the date of the last mission. Morison, 13:152, used January 13.

<sup>51</sup> Headquarters Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, Intelligence Summary Number 254, January 13, 1945, in Air Evaluation Board, Southwest Pacific Area, Luzon Campaign Exhibits, p. 22, file 168.7103-59 HRA.

<sup>52</sup> Hattori, p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> The exact figures for total missions and ships sunk varies considerably. Hattori states that the Japanese Army flew 338 missions. His article has no figure for the total number of Japanese Navy missions, but he claims they lost 285 on kamikaze missions. Reports of MacArthur, 2:569-572, based on Japanese sources, used 400 missions for the Japanese Army and 436 for the Japanese Navy. The USSBS report, which used many of the same sources, used 650 for the total kamikaze missions and 19 ships sunk. USSBS, Japanese Air Power, p. 64. Smith, Triumph, p. 66, listed 24 ships sunk. I have relied on Hattori because it is the most recent data and he is a Japanese historian who had access to the extant records as well as to previous research.

hitting a maneuvering ship with high level bombing was slight, the Japanese had a precision guided weapon: one out of every three kamikaze aircraft was causing damage.<sup>54</sup>

The attacks did, however, extract a horrific attrition rate. The 4th Air Army in the Philippines had about 300 planes before the Leyte invasion in October 1944 and received an additional 2300 planes over the course of the fighting in the Philippines. Only 30 left Luzon.<sup>55</sup> Based largely on estimates that the attacks sank more than 116 ships and damaged at least 191, Japanese officers concluded that their impressive results more than made up for the loss of aircraft. Unwilling or unable to end the war, and taking huge losses in conventional air attacks, the level of effectiveness of the kamikaze attacks compensated for the high attrition rate. For American seamen they were a recurring, and horrifying, problem in the closing months of the war in the Pacific.

Kenney, along with most other Americans, had trouble coming to grips with the kamikaze attacks. He realized that the quality of the Japanese pilots had decreased from 1942, but did not foresee the reaction being the planned suicide attacks.<sup>56</sup>

Kenney heard reports that in some units Japanese pilots were manacled by their ankles

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<sup>54</sup> For overall accuracy problems, see McFarland, pp. 192-194, 284-285, fn. 3. Accuracy for the kamikaze missions was computed using 638 mission and 174 hits/damaging near misses for a 27 percent effective rate. USSBS, Japanese Air Power, p. 76, arrived at approximately the same percentage, but used slightly different figures.

<sup>55</sup> Colonel Matsumae, 4th Air Army, October 27, 1945 cited in Morison, 12:166, fn. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 469.

to the rudders and in others the aircraft canopy was locked from the outside to prevent the pilot from escaping, and concluded that the pilots were being forced to fly such missions against their will. Although he spent little time analyzing why they would resort to such measures, he found it "comforting to find that the Japs themselves didn't trust their 'volunteers' too far."<sup>57</sup> Although it is unclear where Kenney obtained these reports, the most recent historical research does not corroborate his belief.<sup>58</sup>

With most of the Japanese aircraft gone from Luzon, and Yamashita deployed in the mountains to delay the American advance, the Japanese offered little opposition on the beaches of Lingayen Gulf in the early morning hours of January 9. The Sixth Army quickly moved ashore and rapidly began expanding the beachhead.<sup>59</sup> Despite Kenney's efforts during the planning phase, construction of the airfield near the Lingayen beach got off to a slow start. Heavy surf delayed the landing of both the engineers and the steel landing mats for several days. With no enemy air attacks and good weather, however, construction proceeded quickly, and the Lingayen airfield opened on schedule. By January 17 Kenney had enough aircraft on the ground to release the escort carriers.<sup>60</sup> Engineers planned a second airfield at Dagupan, but found the site unsuitable and substituted an area near Mangaldan. The airfield at Mangaldan, commanded by United States Marine Corps Colonel Clayton C. Jerome,

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<sup>57</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 509.

<sup>58</sup> Hattori, p. 17, argues that only in the last few months of the war were the pilots not volunteers.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed description see Smith, Triumph, Chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> Engineers, 6:342-343; Craven and Cate, 5:417-418; Boggs, p. 65.

was completed by January 22, and in early February a fighter group from Fifth Air Force and two Marine Air Groups began flying daily missions under the direction of the 308th Bombardment Wing.<sup>61</sup>

During previous operations the demand for air missions usually exceeded the number of aircraft available, but the situation on Luzon was different. As Krueger advanced south towards Manila, all of Kenney's aircraft were at his disposal. The departure of Japanese aircraft gave the American forces air supremacy over the battlefield, releasing planes previously dedicated to defending against Japanese air attacks. With the Japanese air threat vanquished, there was no need to bomb airfields or send up fighter patrols. Krueger originally planned to isolate the Japanese in the mountains by using aircraft to bomb the bridges and highways leading into the Cagayan Valley.<sup>62</sup> The Japanese decision to stay in the mountains made these missions largely irrelevant so Krueger eventually asked that air attacks on the bridges and railroad cars be stopped because the repairs were slowing the American advance more than enemy action.<sup>63</sup> With little ground movement by the Japanese, no large supply areas to attack, and restricted from bombing roads and railroads, all aircraft could be used in direct support of the ground forces. With an abundance of aircraft, Whitehead had the luxury of assigning an air task force to each corps. The 308th Bombardment Wing was

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<sup>61</sup> Letter, Colonel David W. Hutchinson, 308 Bomb Wing Commander to Commanding Officer First Marine Air Wing, Subject: Commendation for Colonel Jerome, March 28, 1945, Clayton C. Jerome Papers, United States Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D. C.; Engineers, 6:342-343; Craven and Cate, 5:418; Boggs, pp. 56-60, 68-73.

<sup>62</sup> Krueger, p. 214.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, Triumph, pp. 129-131.



attached to I Corps, the 309th to XI Corps, and the 310th to XIV. These pairings allowed closer planning between the ground and air commanders and, naturally, ground commanders were enthusiastic about having unlimited access to a previously scarce asset. Over 90 percent of the air effort expended during the fighting on Luzon was in direct support of the ground forces.<sup>64</sup>

Ground operations were greatly enhanced by the abundance of aircraft. Near the end of January, Krueger's troops had captured the area around Clark Field and were approaching Manila. MacArthur pressed the Sixth Army commander to drive faster, but Yamashita's Shimbu group, perched in the mountains east of Manila, worried Krueger because of the danger it posed to his left flank.<sup>65</sup> The situation was similar to one on Leyte when Krueger fretted about the possibility of a Japanese landing and subsequently slowed his progress through Leyte. On Luzon the problem of the threat to Krueger's flank was partially solved by assigning aircraft to protect the exposed left flank of Krueger's advance--an option unavailable during the earlier fighting on Leyte.<sup>66</sup>

Ground commanders generally praised the effects of the air support missions on Leyte, but attacks on friendly forces during the first few weeks of the invasion marred the endeavor. At the end of January Krueger voiced strong complaints of Fifth Air

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<sup>64</sup> Boggs, 97-98; Craven and Cate, 5:441; Krueger, p. 217; Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, Subject: Percentage of Effort in Support of Ground Troops, March 24, 1945, KP. 24,373 of the 26,250 fighter and bomber sorties were spent on ground support mission.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, Triumph, pp. 211-213; Spector, Eagle, p. 521.

<sup>66</sup> Krueger, p. 241; Boggs, pp. 74-80; Smith, Triumph, pp. 235-236.

Force aircraft bombing and strafing friendly forces and ships. Kenney pressed Whitehead on the issue and urged that "every precaution" be taken to avoid such incidents.<sup>67</sup> A few days later Krueger voiced another protest about P-51s strafing friendly ground forces, killing one soldier and wounding six. When the initial investigation revealed no P-51 missions in the area at the time of the attack, Kenney suspected that Japanese aircraft might have been used in the attack and immediately took steps to find the enemy aircraft.<sup>68</sup> In reality, no airworthy Japanese planes remained on Luzon and the problems between the air and ground forces were generally self-inflicted. The incidents stemmed from a variety of factors, including some similar to those that had plagued the air support efforts in the Papuan campaign: pilots bombing the wrong target, poor communication between the ground soldiers and the pilots, and ground troops operating in specially designated areas where aircraft did not need to receive authorization prior to dropping bombs.<sup>69</sup> Despite better results in many other areas, operations in close support of the ground forces had not significantly improved in over two years of war, in part because of the priority Kenney placed on such missions.

Krueger's Sixth Army captured Manila on March 3, 1945, but Yamashita's forces did not surrender until the war ended. By early March, however, Kenney had already started preparing for the next step in the Allied advance to Tokyo: the invasion

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<sup>67</sup> Message, Kenney to Whitehead, January 31, 1945, KP, *Triumph*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>68</sup> Message, Kenney to Krueger, February 5, 1945, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:442.

<sup>69</sup> Kenney diary, February 5, 1945, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:442.

of Okinawa. Kenney's support for this operation involved attacking the airfields on Formosa, the likely launching sites for kamikaze attacks on the fleet, and cutting off ships sailing to Japan. Before moving northward, however, MacArthur planned on liberating the southern Philippines with the Eighth Army and using the Australians to take control of Borneo. Whatever MacArthur's reasons for undertaking these operations, Kenney did not believe they were needed.<sup>70</sup> He tried to convince MacArthur that dedicating air units to an unnecessary southern offensive prevented them from being moved to the northern Philippines where they could be used in attacking Formosan and Japan. Kenney believed it would take at least six months to move them forward.<sup>71</sup>

Despite Kenney's objections, MacArthur pressed ahead with his plans. Kenney matched Thirteenth Air Force with Eighth Army for operations in the central and southern Philippines, beginning with the invasion of Palawan at the end February. Fighting continued in the southern Philippines until the end of June when Eichelberger declared the fighting on Mindanao over. Like Fifth Air Force on Luzon, Thirteenth Air Force, which included four Marine Air Groups, flew most of its missions in direct support of the ground troops. No Japanese aircraft remained in the area to worry about. In an effort to reduce the need for repairs on docks, harbors, and bridges, Eighth Army engineers asked that aircraft not bomb these targets unless the ground commander specifically requested the mission. The majority of the aircraft were

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<sup>70</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, p. 526-527.

<sup>71</sup> Kenney diary, February 18, 1945, KP.

deployed in close support of the ground advance, for airdrops and aerial resupply, and to provide air cover for the convoys moving between the various landing sites.<sup>72</sup>

Although Kenney monitored the activities during the operations, he focused his attention more on building air bases and supply depots as far forward as possible to bomb Formosa, blockade Japan, and, if necessary, provide air support for an invasion.<sup>73</sup>

### **Trip to Washington**

At the end of February 1944, as Eichelberger began operations in the southern Philippines, Kenney grew concerned about reports from Washington and his relationship with General Arnold. Kenney had asked that Brigadier General Freddie Smith, who had left the Southwest Pacific in late 1943, be sent back to the Philippines to take the place of Major General St. Clair Street, whom Arnold had requested return stateside for reassignment. Before leaving Army Air Forces headquarters in Washington, Smith had overheard several derogatory remarks about Kenney from both Arnold and other members of the staff. Upon his arrival in the Philippines Smith urged that Kenney make a trip to Washington "to make peace with Arnold."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Letter, Paul B. Wurtsmith, Commanding General 13th Air Force, to Commanding General 1st Marine Air Wing, Subject: Statement of Service--Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, August 8, 1945, Jerome Papers; Craven and Cate, 5:450-452, 457, 461-462; Boggs, pp. 108-117, 119-135. For details on the various operations, see Smith, Triumph, Chapters 30-33.

<sup>73</sup> Kenney diary, February 17, 18, 21, March 2, 6, 1945, KP.

<sup>74</sup> Kenney diary, February 8, 23, 1945, KP.

Although Arnold had supplied Kenney with people, planes, and parts and the two had corresponded frequently in 1943, by late 1944 their relationship had soured. Of their several disagreements, perhaps the most damaging conflict occurred over the basing of the B-29s. Kenney's campaign for using the big bombers in the Southwest Pacific clearly aligned him with MacArthur, counter to Arnold's desire to use B-29s to attack the Japanese homeland from the Marianas. Kenney's comments at various meetings with naval officers calling such bombing "stunts" or "nuisance raids" no doubt raised Arnold's ire.<sup>75</sup> Even after it was clear that he was not going to get any of the bombers, Kenney continued to badger Arnold, reportedly predicting "that the Japs would shoot [the B-29s] out of the air" and that the losses would lower morale drastically.<sup>76</sup> These remarks prompted Arnold to relay a warning through Smith that Kenney had better stop his "agitation" about the B-29 or risk being relieved of his command.<sup>77</sup> Given the strength of Kenney's relationship with MacArthur it seems unlikely that Arnold could have made good on the threat, but it does reveal the depth of the discord between the two airmen.

Interference from Arnold's headquarters in Kenney's conduct of the air war also irritated the theater air commander. Kenney, likely echoing MacArthur's attitude,

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<sup>75</sup> Kenney diary, January 27, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, Box 46, Murray Green Collection, pp. 1-2, 4; Hayes, p. 547.

<sup>76</sup> Quote in Letter, Hansell to Major James M. Boyle, December 1964, file 168.7004-64 HRA quoted in Grynkewich, p. 63; Letter Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, p. 4, Box 46, Murray Green Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Interview, General Frederic H. Smith, with Murray Green, Washington, D. C., April 24, 1970, p. 11, Murray Green Collection.

routinely rejected requests or suggestions from Washington and often voiced his displeasure at such interference in local matters.<sup>78</sup> Kenney knew that Arnold himself did not write the messages, and suspected officers he described as "Young Turks" for causing the problems. These high-ranking officers, men like Haywood Hansell and Laurence Kuter, were younger than Kenney, but had been promoted rapidly when the service expanded during the war. Their lack of experience, he argued, was evidenced by the number of impractical ideas they suggested.<sup>79</sup>

The different duties of Kenney and Arnold provided them with varying perspectives which contributed to their differences. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, Arnold focused on the entire global struggle as well as the future of air power and, in particular, the dream of an independent United States Air Force. His position forced him to make difficult choices in a number of areas. He had to balance the number of airplanes and people parceled out to the different theaters, as well as weigh the benefits of continued production of current aircraft and equipment against researching and developing new models.<sup>80</sup> In contrast Kenney, as a theater air commander, devoted his attention to more immediate decisions about what he had to fight with each day and in the near future. Arnold had to produce equipment for a variety of climates and areas, whereas Kenney emphasized what worked in the Southwest Pacific, maintaining that the tactics

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<sup>78</sup> "Notes to discuss with General Arnold," September 1942; Message, Kenney to Arnold, December 25, 1942, KP.

<sup>79</sup> Kenney diary, February 19, 1945, KP.

<sup>80</sup> Weinberg, p. 919.

and equipment developed in his area could easily be transferred to any other combat area.

Their different perspectives also led to disagreements about assignments for officers. Arnold hoped to rotate men from his staff to the combat areas for some experience, but could never get Kenney to agree.<sup>81</sup> After clearing out the "dead wood" in the command, Kenney promoted officers who had proven themselves in combat and guarded against bringing in senior officers with no combat experience and credibility. Like all commanders, Kenney relied on officers he trusted, and for him proof of that trust came after serving in combat in his theater. He returned one general officer with the comment, "his mind is not flexible enough and he does not think clearly or fast enough [for this combat area]."<sup>82</sup> At one point Arnold asked that Whitehead be sent home; a request that brought a howl of protest from Kenney and a reply that he would rather lose his right arm than Whitehead.<sup>83</sup> Although Arnold eventually managed to force Kenney to take some officers, the experiment failed. Kenney felt that he was getting Arnold's "cast-offs" and ended the endeavor, no doubt with MacArthur's backing.<sup>84</sup>

From his perspective, Arnold believed that Kenney kept pilots who had shot down large numbers of enemy aircraft in action too long. A pilot who shot down five

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<sup>81</sup> Interview, Major General John H. McCormick with Murray Green, San Antonio, Texas, May 3, 1970, pp. 12-13, Box 71, Murray Green Collection.

<sup>82</sup> Message, Kenney to Arnold, March 6, 1944, KP.

<sup>83</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 365.

<sup>84</sup> Kenney diary, March 17, 1945, KP.

aircraft was called an ace, a status which marked him as one of the best pilots and made him valuable as a publicity asset.<sup>85</sup> When the Japanese shot down two of the top aces in Kenney's command, Colonel Richard Kearby and Captain Thomas Lynch, just days apart in March, 1944, Arnold grew concerned about the impact this would have on public opinion and the morale of the pilots. He cautioned Kenney to "weigh very carefully the potential value of [his] heroes."<sup>86</sup> Despite Arnold's concern, Kenney kept his leading ace, Major Richard Bong, in combat. Bong returned to the United States for a publicity tour in April 1944, after breaking the American World War I record for the number of enemy aircraft shot down, but went back to the Southwest Pacific in September, 1944. Upon the ace's return Kenney made a half-hearted effort to comply with Arnold's request that Bong be kept out of combat, but claimed that Bong continued to shoot down Japanese aircraft in self-defense. Arnold warned Kenney, "I don't think it is necessary for me to remind you of Kearby. Do you think we should stop this business before there is a duplication of that situation or are the results worthwhile in spite of possible losses of experienced pilots?"<sup>87</sup> Kenney obviously

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<sup>85</sup> For reasons that are still unclear, a minority of pilots account for a large share of the aircraft shot down. Historically about 5 percent of the fighter pilots account for about half of the enemy aircraft shot down, making them extremely valuable combat assets. See Mike Spick, The Ace Factor (Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 1988).

<sup>86</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, March 21, 1944, Arnold Papers, quoted in Grynkewich, p. 34; Perret, pp. 388-389.

<sup>87</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, October 19, 1944, Arnold Papers. In his memoir Kenney downplayed Arnold's concern. Kenney, Reports, p. 470.



thought the results worthwhile--Bong continued to fly until December, 1944, when he was sent home with 40 victories and the Medal of Honor.<sup>88</sup>

While the differing perspectives and conflicting pressures on the two officers are important in understanding their differences, the root of the tension between the two men was Kenney's loyalty. Although Kenney identified more closely with Arnold as an airman, he felt that he owed his primary loyalty to his immediate commander Douglas MacArthur.<sup>89</sup> As Kenney put it, "every once in awhile Arnold would get sore at me about something or other. He thought I was still working for him, but I wasn't. I was working for MacArthur."<sup>90</sup> Kenney believed that Arnold exerted a great deal of influence over air operations in Europe and hoped to do the same in the Pacific. Kenney claimed that MacArthur "resented" interference from Washington and would never have agreed to the level of control over theater air operations that Arnold wanted to implement, forcing Kenney to act as a buffer between the two.<sup>91</sup>

While the main purpose of Kenney's trip to Washington in March, 1945, was to patch up his differences with Arnold, he also attended a number of meetings on ending the war in the Pacific. Kenney met with officers in the Pentagon who asked his views on how long the Japanese would hold out and what American command structure he envisioned for the invasion of Japan. Not surprisingly, Kenney favored MacArthur as

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<sup>88</sup> Kenney, *Reports*, pp. 495-496, 498. Ironically, Bong was killed on August 6, 1945 test flying a new American jet fighter. Kenney, *Reports*, 569.

<sup>89</sup> Kenney, interview with James, p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 54.

<sup>91</sup> Kenney, interview with Hasdorff, p. 57.

the overall commander and felt that the sooner the invasion could take place the sooner the war would end.<sup>92</sup> The ferocity of the resistance on Leyte and Luzon had not altered Kenney's belief that Japan was ready to surrender. He told General Marshall that a landing could be made in Japan "anytime we could get ships to take troops there."<sup>93</sup> Kenney's contention was motivated in part by a desire to move scarce shipping to the Pacific as soon as possible, but he truly believed that the Japanese air units were "through."<sup>94</sup> While Kenney's statement was true in the conventional sense of measuring the capabilities of an air force, the Japanese still had thousands of aircraft available for kamikaze attacks against an invasion of the homeland.<sup>95</sup>

Kenney met Arnold, who was recuperating from a heart attack, in Florida on March 17 and, according to Kenney, they "buried the hatchet."<sup>96</sup> During the meeting Kenney also convinced Arnold to send him some long-range bombers. Although cut off from the B-29s, Kenney was promised the Consolidated B-32 Dominator, an aircraft originally built as a counterpart to the B-29, but never mass-produced. Arnold was considering canceling the contract, but Kenney asked that the first thirty aircraft be sent to the Philippines for a combat test. Kenney flew the aircraft during his visit in Washington and came away impressed with its flying characteristics. He hoped to use

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<sup>92</sup> Kenney diary, March 15, 16, 1945, KP.

<sup>93</sup> Kenney diary, March 15, 1945, KP.

<sup>94</sup> Kenney diary, March 16, 20, 1945, KP.

<sup>95</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 69-71; Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 211-212.

<sup>96</sup> Kenney diary, March 17, 1945, KP.

the plane to bomb the southern Japanese island of Kyushu directly from the Philippines.<sup>97</sup>

During his visit to Washington Kenney made his third visit to the White House to meet with President Roosevelt. Kenney gave the President his impressions of the fighting in the Philippines and repeated his estimate that the invasion of Japan could take place "as soon as we could get the shipping."<sup>98</sup> Kenney found Roosevelt sickly. "He does not look well: his hand shakes when he picks anything up; told me he had lost about 25 [pounds] and had no appetite."<sup>99</sup> It was Kenney's last visit with Roosevelt; the President died just a few weeks later.

Kenney returned to the Philippines at the end of March, pleased about the long-range bombers and relieved to have patched up his relationship with Arnold. Just before his return Kenney received some more good news: promotion to General. MacArthur nominated both Kenney and Krueger for their fourth stars in January. In his promotion recommendation, MacArthur summed up his thoughts on Kenney's contribution: "I believe that no, repeat, no officer suggested for promotion to General has rendered more outstanding and brilliant service than Kenney . . . . Nothing that Spaatz [the American air commander in Europe] or any other air officer has

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<sup>97</sup> Kenney diary, March 16, 17, 20, 1945, KP; Craven and Cate, 7:332; William T. Y'Blood, "Unwanted and Unloved: The Consolidated B-32," Air Power History 42 (Fall 1995): 60-61, 64-65

<sup>98</sup> Kenney diary, March 20, 1945, KP.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

accomplished in the war compares to what Kenney has contributed and none in my opinion is his equal in ability."<sup>100</sup>

## Okinawa

During Kenney's trip to Washington the invasion of Okinawa began. Although none of Kenney's aircraft were directly involved in the landing, they supported the operation through attacks on airfields and other targets on Formosa. Fifth Air Force actually began striking Formosa in late January and continued intermittent attacks, depending on the pace and needs of the fighting on Luzon, from that time on.<sup>101</sup> A shortage of suitable landing fields for heavy bombers that had the range to reach Formosa plagued Kenney's efforts to support the invasion. He hoped to build airfields in the northern part of Luzon, but could not convince MacArthur of the need for more construction, and based most of the long-range aircraft on airfields in the Clark Field area.<sup>102</sup>

Kenney's air efforts in support of the Okinawa invasion continued through the start of the invasion on April 1, 1945, until organized resistance on the island ended on June 21.<sup>103</sup> While the fighting on the ground was horrific and bloody, the distance of Kenney's air units on the Philippines to the battle area on Okinawa limited any

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<sup>100</sup> Message, MacArthur to Marshall, January 17, 1945, RG 4, MMMA; Message, MacArthur to Kenney, January 18, 1945, March 29, 1945, KP.

<sup>101</sup> Kenney diary, January 17, 18, 22, 1945, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:473-474, 476-477.

<sup>102</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:445-447.

<sup>103</sup> Spector, Eagle, pp. 532-540.

contribute they could make to the ground fighting. The continued Japanese kamikaze attacks on the ships off of Okinawa did require Kenney's assistance and his aircraft continued to hit the airfields on Formosa. (Figure 6)

The largest and deadliest kamikaze attacks of the war occurred during the fighting on Okinawa. In order to carry out an offensive of this magnitude, the Japanese Army Air Force and Naval Air Force agreed, for the first time in the entire war in the Pacific, to combine their air units. They launched the first major offensive over a thirty-six hour period on April 6 and 7, sending 355 kamikazes against the American and British fleet. Although the Japanese lost 222 aircraft, they hit thirty ships, sank six, and seriously damaged ten others.<sup>104</sup> Throughout the Okinawa campaign the Japanese staged nine more major attacks, and dozens of smaller missions, flying close to 1,900 kamikaze missions, sinking 25 ships and damaging over 250 others. Although the percentage of ships hit per kamikaze aircraft was less than it had been during the Philippine campaign, the sheer number of attacks and the loss of life were terrifying.<sup>105</sup>

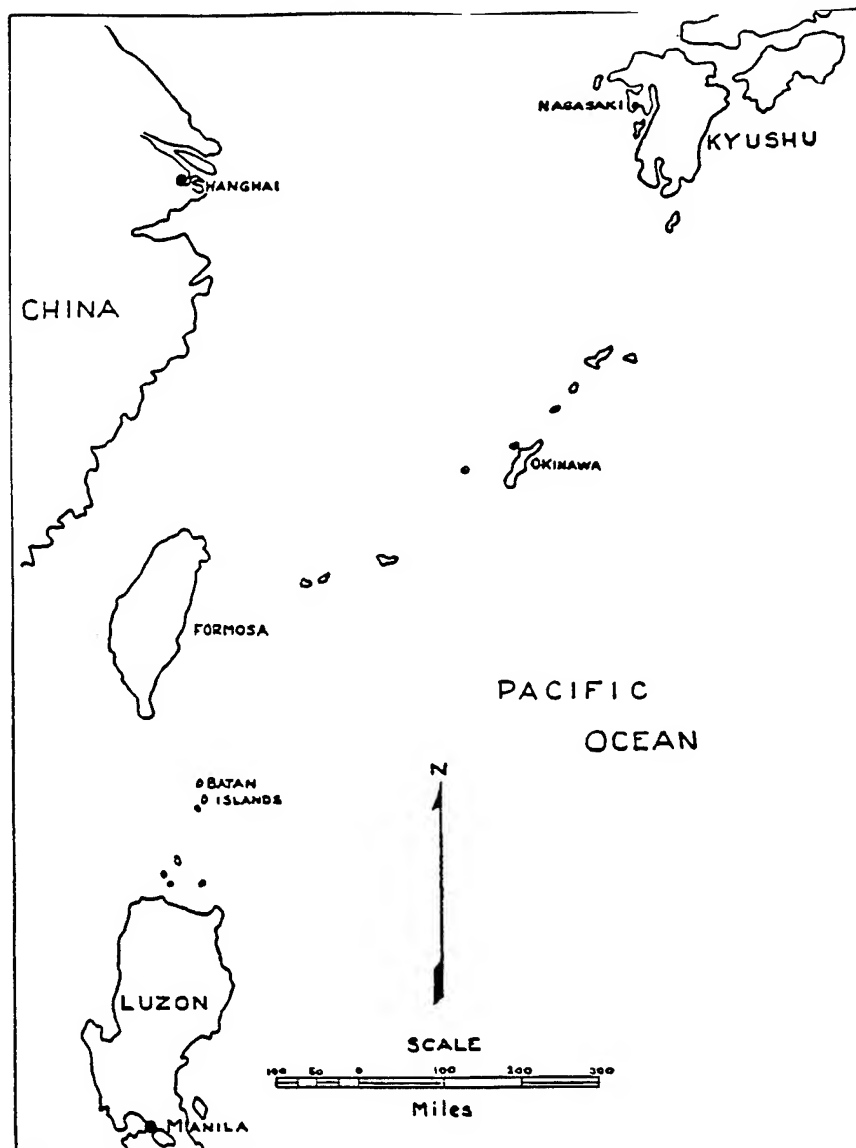
Kenney attempted to suppress the kamikaze missions by bombing the 53 airfields on Formosa to destroy any aircraft capable of attacking the fleet off of Okinawa. After numerous bombing missions, Kenney's intelligence officers speculated that only about 90 planes remained on Formosa. Thinking that most of the Japanese aircraft had been destroyed, Kenney turned his bombers loose on other targets

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<sup>104</sup> Hattori, p. 20; USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 23, 65-68; Spector, Eagle, pp. 536.

<sup>105</sup> Hattori, p. 20; USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 23, 66.

Figure 6--Formosa, Okinawa, and Kyushu<sup>106</sup>



<sup>106</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 548.

including electrical plants, factories, and sugar mills being used to produce synthetic gasoline.<sup>107</sup> This last target caused a contemptuous comment from the Navy admirals suffering through the kamikaze attacks who assumed that most of the attacks originated from Formosa and blamed Kenney for not stopping them. When Halsey was told, incorrectly, that all Kenney's flyers had done was attack sugar mills and other equipment, he "blew up."<sup>108</sup> Although the estimates about the number of aircraft on Formosa were considerably low (a post-war investigation found that there were about 700 aircraft on the island) the attacks by Kenney's flyers, and earlier carrier missions, forced the Japanese to hide many of the aircraft on small airfields that were far away from the main bases, disperse others far from any kind of runway, and even park some planes in towns. Still other aircraft were dismantled and hidden in sections to be reassembled at a later date.<sup>109</sup> All of these actions kept the aircraft safe from destruction, but made it difficult to fly any missions. Only 250 of the almost 2,000 kamikaze attacks originated from Formosa. The majority of such flights originated from bases in Kyushu, but to sow uncertainty in the minds of the American commanders about the locations of the kamikaze bases, pilots were told to fly in such a manner that the Americans would suspect Formosa was the actual launching point.<sup>110</sup> The tactic obviously worked well.

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<sup>107</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:483-484.

<sup>108</sup> Halsey, p. 253; Spector, Eagle, p. 539.

<sup>109</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, p. 38; Craven and Cate, 5:479-480.

<sup>110</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 23, 38; Craven and Cate, 5: 479.

## Planning for OLYMPIC

Even before the end of the fighting on Okinawa, Kenney became deeply involved in discussions over the transfer of Army forces and planning for the invasion of the Japanese home islands. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive for the invasion of Japan was formally issued on May 25, 1945. Although both MacArthur and Nimitz wanted to be named the overall commander, the Joint Chiefs of Staff compromised, putting Nimitz in charge of the naval portion and MacArthur in command of the ground assault. The actual plan of the invasion would be worked out by cooperation between the two commanders. The invasion of Kyushu, codenamed OLYMPIC, was scheduled for November 1, 1945, and the attack on the main island of Honshu, codenamed CORONET, would follow on March 1, 1946.<sup>111</sup>

One of the major sticking points in planning sessions before the invasion was the question of control over the various ground, naval, and air forces. Throughout the war in the Pacific both MacArthur and Nimitz had commanded units belonging to the other service. Army ground and air units had been assigned to Nimitz's Central Pacific command and many of them were still under his direction as they battled the Japanese on Okinawa. Similarly, MacArthur commanded naval units (the Seventh Fleet), in the Southwest Pacific. Because of the decision to divide command for the invasion of Japan along service lines, those Army units currently under Nimitz had to be transferred to MacArthur and the Navy units under MacArthur to Nimitz.

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<sup>111</sup> Spector, Eagle, pp. 541-542; Craven and Cate, 5:686.



Negotiations between the two staffs began in mid-April. While many of the discussions focused on shifting operational control of the units and transferring supplies, Kenney focused on the allocation of airfields under construction on Okinawa. He realized that without airfields he would be unable to support the invasion of Japan. Although the participants hammered out only a tentative agreement at this session, Kenney won two important concessions from Nimitz's staff. He convinced them of the need to build more airfields on Formosa and to turn Seventh Air Force to his control as soon as possible.<sup>112</sup>

Kenney hoped to take control of Seventh Air Force and "pack" Okinawa with as many units as he could to begin bombing southern Japan in July.<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, the tenacious Japanese defense of the island, the slow delivery of supplies, and construction problems that hindered the development of airfields on Okinawa frustrated Kenney's plans. In addition, all of the services wanted to "pack" Okinawa with their aircraft and, despite the earlier promises extracted from Nimitz's staff, Kenney was limited in the number of groups he could call forward. During May and June Kenney participated in numerous meetings on airfield construction and the priority for moving different units onto Okinawa. By the middle of May the Navy had agreed to build airfields for 51 groups and Kenney gained control over the Army aircraft on Okinawa.<sup>114</sup> By the end of June engineers had finished five airfields and six more

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<sup>112</sup> Kenney diary, April 11, 13, 14, 15, 1945; Advanced Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, Memorandum for Commanders in Chief, Army Forces in the Pacific and U. S. Pacific Fleet, April 15, 1945, KP.

<sup>113</sup> Kenney diary, April 11, 1945, KP.

<sup>114</sup> Kenney diary, May 15, 16, 17, 25, 26, 31, 1945, KP.

were under construction, allowing Kenney to move his air task force headquarters forward.<sup>115</sup>

Kenney's air plan for the invasion of Kyushu followed the well-established pattern of previous operations. Although some of his fellow Army Air Force officers hoped that the fire-bombing raids by the B-29s against Japanese cities then underway would produce a surrender, neither Kenney nor Whitehead had much confidence in this route. Kenney told General Arnold: "I am as great a believer in the efficacy of air power to win wars as anyone in the Air Force, but I do not subscribe to any thesis that a few thousand tons of bombs can knock out a nation as highly organized militarily as Japan."<sup>116</sup> Kenney warned that the leaders of Japan would not "become panic stricken simply because a few thousand or even a few hundred thousand civilians are killed by air bombardment."<sup>117</sup> He felt that the only way to end the war was to invade, or at least threaten to invade, Japan.<sup>118</sup>

Whitehead and Fifth Air Force would again serve as the air assault force for the invasion. The battle plan followed the general scheme that he and Kenney had preached throughout the war. Before the invasion Whitehead would eliminate the ability of the Japanese to launch air attacks from western Japan, while simultaneously

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<sup>115</sup> Kenney diary, June 1, 1945, KP; Dod, pp., 657-660.

<sup>116</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, p. 3, Murray Green Collection.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, April 8, 1945, file 730. 161-3 HRA; Kenney diary, June 17, 1945, KP.

isolating southern Japan from reinforcements or supplies from China. After eliminating or severely reducing this traffic, airmen would turn their attention to isolating Kyushu from the rest of Japan by attacking roads and railroads as well as small boats and barges along the coast. Finally, Fifth Air Force would cover the actual landing on Kyushu.<sup>119</sup>

Integrating the huge number of airplanes flying over Japan promised to be a headache. Just as at Hollandia, Leyte, and Luzon, there would be no single air commander for OLYMPIC. Instead, air planners separated aircraft by geographical boundaries. An added complication to the air operations for OLYMPIC was the addition of the B-29 bombers. Although General Arnold technically commanded those bombers from Washington, he sent General Carl Spaatz over from Europe to head the strategic air forces in the Pacific, an independent command which made him equal in rank to both MacArthur and Nimitz. MacArthur objected to Spaatz's presence in the theater and could not understand why Arnold would not turn the aircraft over to Kenney. According to Kenney, MacArthur considered Arnold's plan an example of "unwarranted interference" and "accused the Air Forces of trying to show they could win the war by themselves."<sup>120</sup> Kenney, in anticipation of the war ending and wary of his future in an independent Air Force, did not protest Spaatz's arrival or the organizational changes. Although he privately complained that the addition of a new

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<sup>119</sup> Letter, Whitehead to Kenney, April 8, 1945; Letter, Headquarters Fifth Air Force to Commanding General Far East Air Forces, Subject: Air Plan for Operation Olympic, June 26, 1945, file 730.322-3 HRA.

<sup>120</sup> Kenney diary, June 17, 1945, KP.

air command in the Pacific was "another needless complication"<sup>121</sup> his talk with Arnold may have convinced him that public disagreements between Army air officers would hurt the drive for service independence. Outwardly, Kenney supported Arnold's plan and persuaded MacArthur that it was workable.<sup>122</sup> When Spaatz arrived in the Pacific in early July, Kenney quickly made arrangements to discuss any disputes privately and to "present a unified front to all comers."<sup>123</sup>

Kenney's agreement with Spaatz, however, did little to solve the problem of bringing together the various American aircraft over Japan. With so many aircraft trying to hit targets in one area he felt it would be better to "put all of the participating air forces under one control and issue one set of orders assigning times, routes, and targets and let the kids do their stuff."<sup>124</sup> With the end of the war in sight, however, the interservice tensions that might have been submerged in other situations were coming to the fore, making it impossible to name a single air commander. At one point naval officers proposed dividing the enemy airspace by land and sea: the Navy would take care of targets on the sea, restricting the Army Air Forces to land targets: a plan Kenney thought driven by the Navy's constant desire "to get the credit for all operations over the sea" and the accompanying publicity.<sup>125</sup> An indication of the

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<sup>121</sup> Kenney, Reports, p. 545.

<sup>122</sup> Kenney diary, June 10, 16, 17, 1945; Craven and Cate, 5:684-688.

<sup>123</sup> Kenney diary, July 5, 1945, KP; Letter, Brigadier General Richard C. Lindsay, to Norstad, August 6, 1945, quoted in Craven and Cate, 5:701.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Kenney diary, June 2, 1945, quote from July 5, 1945, KP; Craven and Cate, 5:690.

growing tensions between the services as the war ended was Kenney's remark that if such an arrangement had been put into effect he would ignore the restrictions and "hit targets whenever their importance justified it."<sup>126</sup> He maintained that a Navy protest over the Army's sinking of a Japanese ship would just bring the Navy bad publicity because of the difficulty of "proving we were wrong in sinking Japanese vessels."<sup>127</sup>

At a conference in early August, air commanders finally agreed to divide the Japanese airspace at 135 degrees east longitude (just west of Osaka). Kenney's air units had free reign and could attack any targets west of the line, but their primary objective was to destroy the Japanese air units and isolate southern Kyushu. Likewise the carrier aircraft flying east of the line would concentrate on destroying every Japanese aircraft they could find. The B-29s in Spaatz's strategic air force continued to pound Japanese cities, but were required to provide prior notice of their attacks to both Kenney and the Navy so that they could keep away from the cities at the time of the B-29 raids. In general, aircraft were expected to stay in their respective areas, but could cross the boundary line with 24-hour advanced warning or in an emergency.<sup>128</sup> The only change to these boundaries for the actual landing was the addition of a new area around southern Kyushu that would come into affect the week prior to the amphibious assault in which Fifth Fleet would supply most of the aircraft and be in charge of the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Memo for Record: Staff Conference by Representatives of CINCAFPAC-CINCPAC-COMGENUSASTAF, August 1, 1945, Subject: Coordination of Air Operations Prior to and during the conduct of Olympic, August 1, 1945; General Coordination of Air Forces, Maps, Chamberlin Papers; Air Plan for Operation OLYMPIC.

various missions. Kenney's air units would be on call to support the landing and retained responsibility for attacking targets on Kyushu outside of the immediate landing beaches.<sup>129</sup>

At the same time that commanders and planners were finalizing arrangements for air operations during the invasion, Kenney grappled with the continuing problem of moving his aircraft forward to attack Kyushu. Although over half of the airfields on Okinawa had been allocated for Kenney's units, by early August only four fighter groups and two night fighter squadrons were on the island; the rest delayed by a lack of shipping. Kenney had taken over control of Seventh Air Force in the middle of July and used those aircraft to bomb Kyushu, but problems in getting supplies to Okinawa limited operations.<sup>130</sup> Although one attack by Kenney's units destroyed 57 potential kamikaze aircraft at one Japanese air base, the missions barely made a dent in the 10,000 aircraft available for defending the home islands.<sup>131</sup> With problems getting aircraft and supplies to Okinawa and a focus on first eliminating the Japanese air threat, Kenney did not have enough additional aircraft to isolate Kyushu. As a result, during June and July the Japanese doubled the number of soldiers near the invasion beaches.<sup>132</sup> The Japanese ability to build up their defenses on the beaches resulted, in part, from Kenney's decision to go after aircraft and supplies rather than the roads and

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Craven and Cate, 5:693-695.

<sup>131</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 211-212.

<sup>132</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, pp. 215-217.

railroads. While different priorities might have reduced the ground defenses, it seems likely that suicide planes would have made a huge impact on the invasion.<sup>133</sup>

In any event the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in early August made much of the planning and speculating on the invasion irrelevant. Kenney knew very little about the atomic bombs before the first attack on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Marshall sent MacArthur a message in early July restricting certain cities in Japan for air attack and Kenney was later told that he would receive 12 hours advanced warning of a special mission.<sup>134</sup> When he received this warning he was to keep aircraft 50 miles away from the designated target four hours before and six hours after the target time.<sup>135</sup> Although restricted from the areas where the atomic bombs exploded, Kenney's aircraft continued operations after the two nuclear detonations on August 6 and 9. Kenney halted flying operations on August 12, but after a two-day respite, during which frantic peace negotiations between Japan and the United States took place, President Harry S. Truman ordered more attacks for August 15. The President's announcement of the Japanese agreement to surrender that same day stopped aircraft already enroute to their targets. Kenney's airmen continued to fly reconnaissance missions over Japan to provide an American presence and as a warning

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<sup>133</sup> For discussion of the failure to go after railroads and roads see, USSBS, The War Against Japanese Transportation 1941-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), pp. 10-11; Craven and Cate, 5:699. A post-war study about the potential of the kamikaze planes is mentioned in Weinberg, p. 883.

<sup>134</sup> Kenney diary, July 5, 1945, August 2, 1945; Kenney, Reports, p. 568.

<sup>135</sup> Messages, COMGENUSASTAF [Spaatz] to COMGENUSAFPAC [MacArthur], August 2, 1945, August 4, 1945, Box 61, Sutherland Papers, NA.

to the Japanese military leaders not to reinitiate hostilities. During reconnaissance missions on August 17 and 18 Japanese fighters attacked some of the new B-32s which Kenney lobbied for during his trip to Washington in March. The bombers shot down at least 3 Japanese planes, the last losses in a long war. The march to Tokyo was over.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

Kenney learned his lessons from the experiences at Leyte. He took no chances with the landings on Mindoro and Luzon, expending great effort to ensure that his land-based aircraft would be in position to support the operations. The kamikaze threat posed the biggest challenge to Kenney over this period. Although large numbers of Japanese aircraft were destroyed determined attackers still menaced the American fleet. For the invasion of Japan Kenney planned to stick to his template of previous operations, gaining control of the air, isolating the battle area, and then supporting the ground advance. As the end of war neared, Kenney also reestablished his ties with General Arnold and the Army Air Forces. Although Kenney retained his primary loyalty to MacArthur, concerns about the interservice rivalries after the war assumed prominence over fighting the war.

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<sup>136</sup> Kenney, Reports, pp. 570-571; Craven and Cate, 5:699; Y'Blood, pp. 67-69.



## Chapter Eleven

### Conclusion

**"It may be truthfully said that no air commander ever did so much with so little."<sup>1</sup>**

On the morning of September 2, 1945, George Kenney stood on the deck of the battleship Missouri and witnessed the official surrender ceremony ending the war in the Pacific. Watching the official proceedings, he might have been tempted to contrast his position as victor with the situation he had faced three years earlier. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japanese forces had advanced virtually unimpeded through the Pacific. By the time of Kenney's arrival in Australia in late July, 1942, it was unclear where, or when, the Japanese would stop. They had swiftly taken control of the East Indies, a location they termed the "southern resources area," and along the way eliminated the American Air Force in the Philippine Islands prior to capturing that territory. When Kenney landed in Australia, Allied forces everywhere were on the defensive.

Kenney's arrival coincided with the start of two major offensives in the Southwest Pacific. During the early days of the war the Japanese had captured Rabaul, located on the northeastern tip of New Britain, a base from which they could defend the southern part of their defensive perimeter. In a bid to wrest control of the eastern part

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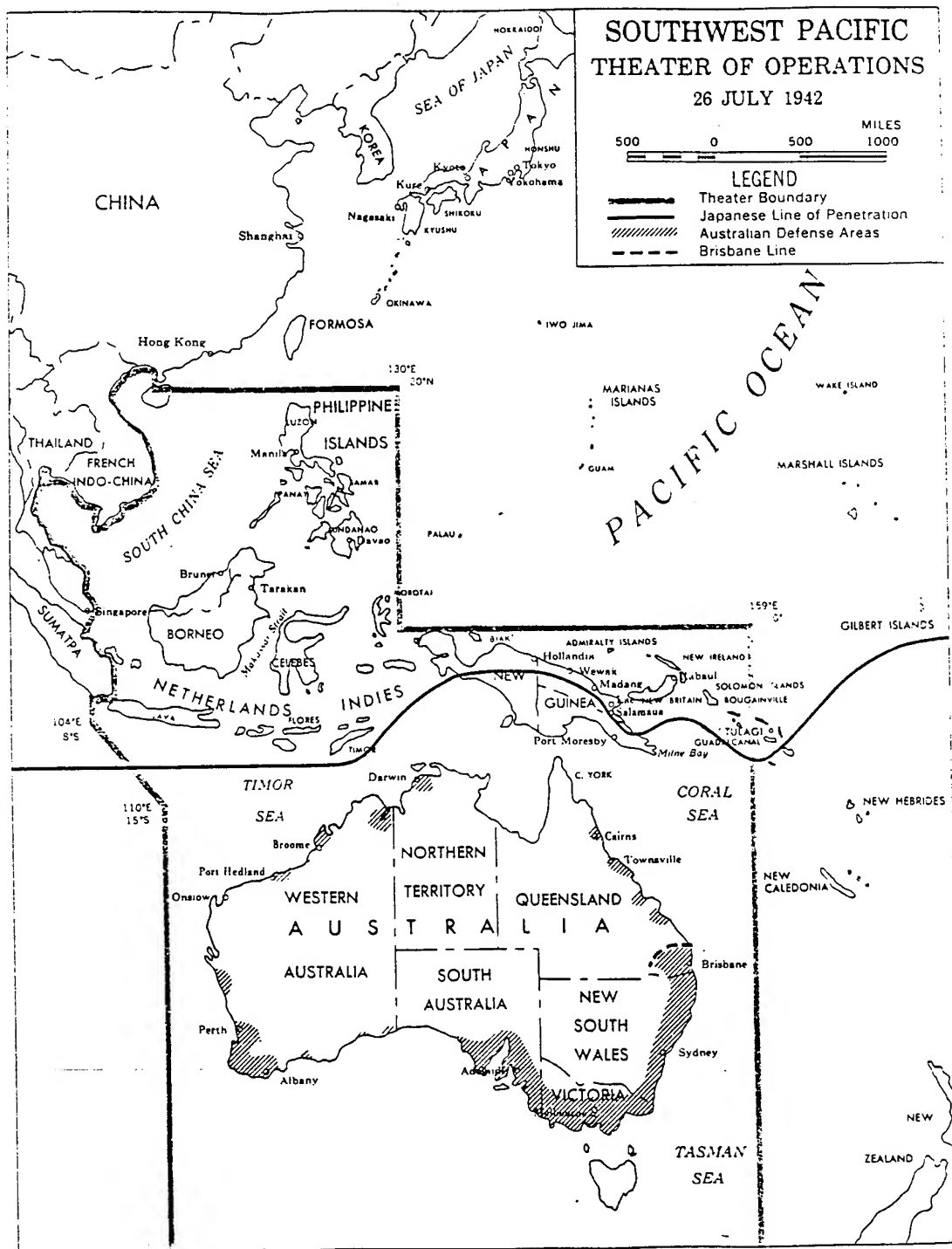
<sup>1</sup> Message, Arnold to Kenney, August 19, 1945, KP.

of New Guinea and isolate Australia in late July, 1942, Japanese forces landed on the northern coast of New Guinea and marched overland to capture Port Moresby.

General Douglas MacArthur, the top American and Allied commander in the Southwest Pacific theater, was determined to stop the Japanese advance and remove this threat to Australia. About the same time as the Japanese attack on New Guinea, American forces landed in the Solomon Islands at Guadalcanal to control the sea and air lanes between the United States and Australia. Although this offensive did not fall under MacArthur's direction, the American landing at Guadalcanal required his support, especially in the use of air power. (Figure 7)

Prior to Kenney's arrival, the Allied air forces had been largely ineffectual in air combat against the Japanese. The surprise attack by the Japanese on December 8, 1941, decimated the American air units at Clark Field and air power contributed little to the defensive stand in the Philippines. In other early battles of the war in the Pacific a variety of factors including a lack of spare parts, too few aircraft, inappropriate tactics, and poor training handicapped Allied airmen in their efforts to stem the Japanese advance. Although the incumbent Allied Air Forces commander, Major General George Brett, struggled to overcome the multitude of problems he faced, by June 1942, MacArthur had lost confidence in Brett's ability to lead the air operation effectively.

Figure 7--Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Engineers, 6:2.

Gaining the trust and confidence of Douglas MacArthur became Kenney's first priority and was, perhaps, his greatest challenge when he assumed command. Kenney had been appraised of the troubles between Brett and MacArthur before leaving the United States, and was certainly aware of the need to get along with the theater commander. Kenney faced two formidable obstacles in accomplishing this objective. MacArthur was known for having an extremely tight-knit and loyal staff which controlled both access and information to the commander. These officers left the Philippines with MacArthur and on their arrival in Australia earned the nickname the "Battan Gang." Kenney also had to contend with the animosity between air and ground officers about the role of air power that had been building up for the past two decades. Soldiers believed that air power would be useful in combat, but should be divided between units and closely harnessed to them for the ground fighting. Airmen, on the other hand, argued that air power could best be employed as a consolidated force in pursuit of theater objectives under the control of single air commander. Early on, Kenney made a concerted effort to tackle the potential organizational roadblocks. His most important move with MacArthur's staff came when Kenney outmaneuvered MacArthur's chief of staff Major General Richard Sutherland, an imperious officer who had kept the previous air commanders away from MacArthur, and established direct access to the theater commander. Kenney's showdown with Sutherland dovetailed with his efforts at gaining the trust and confidence of Douglas MacArthur, a campaign that included everything from talking with MacArthur regularly during the day to social visits in the evening. Kenney's outgoing, aggressive personality, coupled

with his professional knowledge and enterprising attitude, appealed to MacArthur. The two men established a close personal and professional relationship, allowing Kenney to overcome the potential hazards posed by MacArthur's staff and the institutional differences between airmen and ground officers.

No matter how good the personal chemistry between MacArthur and Kenney, however, the airman had to demonstrate his ability as commander. In making decisions as a theater air commander Kenney drew on a long career spent learning about air warfare and preparing for the position. His combat duty as an observation pilot in World War I provided a wealth of experiences about the nature of warfare, including a sense of the chaos and uncertainty of warfare and the reactions of people under fire. In addition, he had taken away some specific lessons on air combat. The horrific losses of pilots in his squadron stamped on him the importance of training before sending young men to war. Almost getting shot down by enemy aircraft while trying to accomplish a mission imparted on him the importance of gaining control of the air.

After World War I, Kenney remained in the service and served in a variety of different areas in the Army Air Corps. He learned about the new science of aeronautics and researched the problems and possibilities involved in modifying and building aircraft, duty that gave him some insight into both the technical advantages and limitations of air power. In the years between the two World Wars, Kenney also spent many years in military schools and on staffs, which expanded his understanding away from a narrow focus on flying to a broader view of the problems involved in

organizing and employing an air force in combat. At the premier military school for airmen, the Air Corps Tactical School, Kenney investigated and codified doctrine on attack aviation and explored low-altitude bombing methods. As the operations officer in the first separate combat air headquarters in the United States Army, called General Headquarters Air Force, Kenney saw the variety of problems air units encountered during the exercises and maneuvers that simulated combat. Even before the United States entered the war, indeed even before the war in Europe started, Kenney's exposure to the myriad of situations that an air commander might face allowed him to think and write about the components needed to build a combat air force and how air power should be used in warfare.<sup>3</sup> Of course, Kenney's experiences could not, and did not, prepare him for every possibility he would face in the war. He knew little of the improving ability of American intelligence organizations to intercept and decode radio communications and the benefits such information provided to a commander. In addition, Kenney, like most Army officers, was given little training or education in sea operations and had little appreciation for how the Navy planned to wage war. On balance, however, Kenney's background prepared him well to plan and lead air operations.

In carrying out an air campaign Kenney believed that an air commander should "get control of the air situation before you try anything else."<sup>4</sup> He had personally witnessed the difficulty of carrying out missions without air superiority in the skies

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<sup>3</sup> Kenney, "Airplane in Modern Warfare," pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 21, 1943, p.1, KP.

over western Europe in World War I and continued to believe that this was an absolutely vital first step in modern warfare. Gaining air superiority was necessary before commanders could seriously consider other air, ground, or sea operations. Since the Japanese aircraft factories and other industrial targets were beyond the range of Allied aircraft in the Southwest Pacific, Kenney sought to achieve air superiority by destroying Japanese aircraft on the ground and shooting them down in the sky. He argued that the plan sounds "simple but actually it is a long and difficult job."<sup>5</sup>

Kenney maintained his commitment to gaining air superiority through every campaign in the war. During the fighting for Port Moresby and Guadalcanal that began in July and August, 1942, Kenney dispatched bombers to take out Japanese aircraft on the ground at Rabaul. He reasoned that these attacks would reduce Japanese air strength in the region, supporting both MacArthur's fighting in New Guinea and the offensive on Guadalcanal. In addition, he pushed for improvements in the air defense network around New Guinea, an effort aided by the Allies' ability to intercept Japanese radio transmissions, providing early warning of enemy bombing raids. The advanced warning allowed Allied pilots to adopt hit-and-run tactics which exploited the advantages of their aircraft and resulted in an increasing ability to down Japanese aircraft without suffering excessive losses.

Alongside Kenney's effort at gaining control of the air he also used aircraft to isolate the Japanese garrisons in eastern New Guinea by bombing the ships bringing supplies to the island or attacking the reinforcements being transported over land.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

Kenney believed that these types of missions, known as interdiction, offered the best use of air power in support of ground warfare. He instituted low-altitude tactics, introduced new munitions, and took advantage of the Allied information on Japanese movements to cut off the battle areas of New Guinea during the last half of 1942.

While Kenney realized the importance of using air power to support ground combat he argued strongly for interdiction missions and against dedicating aircraft to bombing the enemy positions at the front lines, called close air support. Nevertheless, at times during the fighting in the Papuan Campaign on New Guinea in the last half of 1942, Kenney dispatched aircraft on close air support missions, though with less than ideal results. Pilots had difficulty locating and attacking targets on the ground through the thick jungle canopy and often could not locate their own forces, on several occasions actually dropping bombs on American troops.

Despite the problems with the close air support missions, Kenney's attitude and ability to produce success increased his credibility with MacArthur, allowing Kenney to become a close advisor to the theater commander, offering advice on a wide range of issues. Rather than oppose the Japanese headlong in the steamy jungle of New Guinea, Kenney offered to airlift ground forces and outflank the Japanese advance. Although some members of MacArthur's staff thought Kenney's suggestion unreasonable, MacArthur grasped the benefits of such a plan and eagerly accepted Kenney's offer. Soon transports were flying in soldiers, food, ammunition, and even artillery pieces to the front lines in Papua and flying out the sick and wounded.



This first offensive in New Guinea ended in January, 1943, and Kenney viewed the Papuan campaign as a template for future operations in the Southwest Pacific. MacArthur's forces were scheduled to advance up the coast of New Guinea and then assault Rabaul. Only after capturing this base would MacArthur be free to continue through New Guinea, recapture the Philippines, and invade Japan. Although a map of the Southwest Pacific in early 1943 showed huge chunks of territory under Japanese control, in reality this defensive perimeter rested on relatively small forces deployed in a series of points along the coast of New Guinea and on island outposts. The terrain and geography of the region restricted the Japanese to these areas that could be isolated and defeated in detail or simply by-passed. To carry out this operational scheme, Kenney's plans were to take control of the air in advance of the next objective while simultaneously isolating the Japanese ground forces from reinforcements and supplies. The garrisons thus weakened and unprotected, Kenney concentrated his air units on bombing the enemy positions near the amphibious landing area both prior to and during an invasion. In some cases, Allied ground forces could even be air transported into an area and resupplied by aircraft—eliminating the need for the amphibious landings. Once the ground soldiers rid the area of enemy forces, engineers moved in to build the airfield from which the next advance could be mounted, and the whole process was repeated.<sup>6</sup> Although the details of each specific operation varied, this general outline

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<sup>6</sup> "Notes to discuss with General Arnold," September 24, 1942; Kenney diary, December 16, 1942, KP; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, October 24, 1942, quoted in Craven and Cate, 4:119.

of MacArthur's operations in the Southwest Pacific remained the same: by-passing the strongest held Japanese positions and defeating the remaining outposts.

Although Kenney's contribution to this strategy was important, MacArthur was aware of the potential of air power for the war in the Southwest Pacific even before Kenney's arrival. During MacArthur's tenure as Chief of Staff the General Headquarters Air Force had been formed. MacArthur was also primed for exploiting the advantages of air power after suffering through the devastating Japanese surprise air attack on December 8, 1941, which wiped out virtually all of the aircraft in the Philippines, forcing American troops to fight without the benefit of friendly air cover. MacArthur proved a willing student for air power and he and Kenney spent a great deal of time talking about future operations, deliberating on a variety of topics including how air power might hasten MacArthur's return to the Philippines and the eventual defeat of Japan. The highly successful "leap-frog" strategy used by MacArthur to avoid the strongly held, but widely separated, Japanese garrisons required air superiority and depended on the aggressive, flexible, and focused use of aviation to interdict men and supplies, harass enemy communications, transport Allied soldiers and material to battle, provide protection for shipping and amphibious assaults, and fly in direct support of the ground fighting. Kenney helped convince MacArthur of the particular advantages offered by aircraft, but MacArthur's support of his air commander provided Kenney the opportunity to implement his ideas. General Arnold summed up the importance of the relationship between the two when he told Kenney, "I don't believe the units could possibly perform the missions in the manner that they

are doing without the most sympathetic support from General MacArthur. It requires complete understanding between General MacArthur and you."<sup>7</sup>

Although the general outline of MacArthur's operations became clear with the end of the fighting in Papua, several months would pass until enough American ground forces had been sent to Australia to carry out this scheme. The temporary hiatus in ground fighting offered no respite for airmen, however. During the first half of 1943, Kenney's airmen fought to gain and maintain air superiority and isolate the Japanese forces in New Guinea. Although dogmatic in his beliefs about the proper sequence of air operations, Kenney demonstrated great flexibility in carrying out the missions. Indeed, Kenney's mental agility and willingness to sponsor innovations represent the hallmarks of his command.

In carrying out his aim of gaining air superiority Kenney needed to be able to engage and defeat Japanese fighters. Very early in the war he realized the error in previous Army Air Corps thinking about the need for long-range fighters to accompany bombers to their targets. Kenney quickly realized the need to increase the distance his fighters could fly and pressed forward with efforts to increase the range of fighter aircraft to allow them to accompany the bombers to their targets and reduce the losses inflicted by enemy fighters.

Perhaps the most dramatic and far-reaching change Kenney made from the pre-war thinking involved the shift from high-altitude bombing of enemy ships to low-altitude attacks. Despite his later claims to the contrary, Kenney did not invent this

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<sup>7</sup> Letter, Arnold to Kenney, September 23, 1943, p. 1, KP.

tactic. He did, however, eagerly adopt it and the low-level bombing of enemy ships became routine in the Southwest Pacific. Though inspired by his previous work on low altitude attacks while an instructor in attack aviation at the Air Corps Tactical School, Kenney made the change to low-level bombing for more pragmatic reasons. The weather in the Southwest Pacific and the number of operational aircraft available at any one time made it impossible to put as many aircraft in the air as the doctrine manuals recommended. Further, the inaccuracy of high-altitude bombing made it extremely difficult to sink maneuvering ships, no matter how many aircraft were available. The move to low-altitude bombing along with regular and more realistic training, improved munitions suitable for low-level bombing, and superb intelligence about Japanese shipping movements, made it possible for Kenney's airmen to begin sinking many more Japanese vessels. The most dramatic and public success occurred in early March 1943, when the Japanese attempted to send reinforcements from Rabaul to their garrison at Lae. Kenney's aircraft located and tracked the sixteen ship convoy for two days prior to devastating the formation off the coast of New Guinea on the morning of March 3, 1943 in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. The results sent a clear signal to the Japanese high command that they could no longer send large-sized reinforcements to eastern New Guinea, effectively sealing the fate of the garrisons.

Though Kenney did not personally produce every new or innovative idea, his focus on whatever it took to get results and willingness to jettison established methods encouraged innovation in his command. As a result, his airmen performed better with less. He created an atmosphere within his organization that allowed creative thinking

to flourish, producing ideas that ranged from sawing trucks in half so that they could fit into air transport planes to grafting a tailgun turret onto the nose of the B-24 in order to increase its forward fire power.

While many of the changes involved technical adaptations to aircraft and equipment, Kenney also instituted a number of organizational changes. When he arrived in Australia, he found command arrangements ill-suited to the demands of the theater. Kenney's predecessor, Major General George Brett, combined American and Australian air units into one command, even to the point of mixing nationalities in the same aircraft. Although Brett adopted these measures largely out of necessity, the situation irritated MacArthur who objected to the idea of American forces being under the command of officers from another nation. Kenney moved quickly to separate Australian and American air units into separate organizations. A separation he found useful for improving combat effectiveness and his relationship with MacArthur.

The long distances and poor communications between MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane (where most of the high-level planning took place) and the forward airfields in New Guinea forced Kenney to delegate much of the responsibility for daily operations to a commander near the airfields. For this crucial position Kenney tapped Major General Ennis Whitehead. Whitehead would command Fifth Air Force Advanced Echelon, dubbed "Advon" for short, at Port Moresby and was responsible for overseeing daily missions. Perhaps because they entered the service at the same time and were part of the same service "generation," Kenney and Whitehead shared much of the same outlook on warfare and they rarely disagreed on a course of

action. Oftentimes Kenney's tasks for the upcoming air operations, which he outlined in frequent letters to Whitehead, had already been foreseen and planned at Advon headquarters. Kenney had great respect for Whitehead's ability, confidence in his judgment, and total trust in his deputy, the two made an outstanding team. There is no doubt that much of Kenney's success rested on the talent and ability of his subordinates, especially Whitehead. Kenney admitted as much when he called Whitehead "my strong right arm all through the war."<sup>8</sup> With Whitehead in charge of offensive operations from Port Moresby, Kenney named Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock to head the separate RAAF Command based in Australia. Although RAAF Command contained some American units, it was primarily an Australian outfit, dedicated to the air and sea defense of the country.

In June, 1943, MacArthur's amphibious assaults along the northern coast of New Guinea began in earnest. Through the rest of the year, in a series of well-integrated air, land, and sea operations, MacArthur's forces moved westward to outflank the Japanese position at Rabaul. Kenney stuck to his basic template of operations, but continued to add innovative methods. Despite attempts to increase the range of his fighters, they still lacked the ability to fly from the Allied bases in eastern New Guinea near Buna and Port Moresby to the Japanese airfields at Wewak. To overcome this handicap he built a forward airfield close to Wewak. This forward site, combined with an intricate plan to deceive the Japanese as to the location of the airfield, made it possible to spring a devastating raid on the Japanese airfields and gain

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<sup>8</sup> Kenney interview with James, p. 3.

air superiority over the Huon Peninsula--the essential precursor to the amphibious assaults. During the inland advance through the Markham Valley that followed, American air units worked closely with Australian ground forces to quickly capture territory before the Japanese could take possession and build strong defensive positions, providing transportation, food, and fire power for the ground soldiers.

Although MacArthur had originally planned to invade Rabaul after gaining control of the Huon Peninsula, the American advance through New Guinea, coupled with Admiral Halsey's control over the Solomons and Admiral Nimitz's advance in the Central Pacific, made it possible to bypass Rabaul. MacArthur could now turn his full attention to controlling the rest of New Guinea and moving beyond to the Philippines. In early 1944, as MacArthur's staff planned the impending operations in New Guinea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington searched for ways to speed up the war in the Pacific. MacArthur suggested combining all of the naval, air, and ground forces under his command, a proposal the Navy rejected, arguing that the forces allocated to MacArthur's thrust should instead be sent to the Central Pacific. In the midst of these negotiations, Kenney came forward with a bold proposition. The next step in MacArthur's conquest of New Guinea was an invasion of the Admiralty Islands, scheduled for April, 1944. When Kenney received reports from aircrews that the Japanese had deserted the islands, he suggested an early invasion. This was a risky move, but if successful would isolate Rabaul completely, accelerate MacArthur's return to the Philippines, and ensure that the Navy did not steal the show in the Pacific. Despite other intelligence reports that contradicted Kenney's information, MacArthur

pressed ahead with the attack. Although Kenney's contention that the Japanese had deserted turned out to be wrong, the attack surprised the Japanese forces on the islands and resulted in an impressive victory for MacArthur. He could now move westward and on to the Philippines.

Although Kenney became a close advisor to MacArthur during the war, and helped shape his views on how air power could best be used, it is possible to overstate Kenney's influence. On occasion MacArthur ignored Kenney's advice, as in the planning for the attack on Hollandia in April, 1944. Prior to this operation in western New Guinea, MacArthur's advances had always enjoyed the protection of Kenney's aircraft. An invasion at Hollandia would avoid the strong Japanese position at Hansa Bay but was too far from Kenney's air bases for him to provide air cover during the landing, forcing MacArthur to rely on aircraft carriers for protection. Kenney argued forcefully against this plan, maintaining that the planes on the carriers had limited range and could only carry small bomb loads, making them ill-equipped to support the amphibious attack. Kenney also pointed out that the aircraft carriers themselves had serious limitations. They routinely had to stop flying operations in order to take on fuel, food, and ammunition. As a result, carriers could only continue operations for a limited time and might have to leave an area at a crucial moment.

Despite Kenney's complaints, the attack on Hollandia went forward without the protection of land-based aircraft. The ability to outflank the largest concentration of Japanese forces in New Guinea and prevent a long and bloody ground fight, the need for a supply base that could support the invasion of the Philippines, and the chance to



speed up the rate of MacArthur's advance all outweighed the air commander's advice.

Kenney's aircraft did not cover the actual landing at Hollandia, but they still managed to eliminate the Japanese aircraft in the area prior to the invasion. The significant air attacks on Hollandia at the end of March, 1944, blended many aspects of Kenney's success in the Southwest Pacific. Excellent intelligence keyed the timing of the bombing missions. Kenney's airmen did not attack until after the Japanese had packed the airfield with planes and equipment, but just before they moved the aircraft westward to a location that would have allowed the Japanese to oppose the landing at Hollandia, while keeping their aircraft safe from attack. Tactically, the conduct of the mission was characteristic of Kenney's approach--long-range fighters escorting a low-level bombing force. The attack surprised the Japanese and brought spectacular results with few American losses. Lacking any air presence in western New Guinea and deceived into thinking that the attack would occur elsewhere, the Japanese could offer little resistance to the invasion at Hollandia.

Although engineers found that they had overstated the usefulness of the location to support air bases and supply depots, few could deny the importance of gaining this site for containing the Japanese presence in New Guinea and supporting future operations. The aircraft carriers returned to the Central Pacific fleet after the invasion of Hollandia in April, 1944, leaving Kenney to return to his earlier methods. For the remainder of the fighting in New Guinea ground forces moved forward under air protection to capture a site to build an airfield, which could then be used to support the next leap forward.

During these operations over the next few months Kenney and other Allied commanders became increasingly convinced of a decline in the capability of the Japanese forces. After receiving little resistance on several bombing raids in the Philippines, Admiral Halsey suggested eliminating the scheduled invasion of Mindanao in the southern Philippines for one on Leyte. Invading Leyte earlier than planned would accelerate the American invasion of Luzon, a move which would completely sever the sea lanes between Japan and the southern resources area and place American forces in a prime position for invading Japan. Bypassing Mindanao, however, also meant no land-based air support for the invasion of Leyte, forcing MacArthur to rely once again on the aircraft carriers for air support. This time Kenney chose not to voice any criticism about using aircraft carriers when the decision was made to invade the Philippines without the benefit of land-based aircraft.

Although the landing on Leyte on October 20, 1944, encountered no major problems, the entire campaign took much longer and was far costlier than anticipated, in part because the decision to rely solely on aircraft carriers forced American ground forces to fight without air superiority. Aircraft carriers ably covered the initial landing but were battered by Japanese surface and air attacks and in need of refurbishment, forcing them to depart, as Kenney had earlier feared, soon after the invasion. At the same time building the airfields on Leyte to support land-based planes turned out to be very difficult and took much longer than originally planned, further eroding the Allied air advantage. Although in planning meetings prior to the invasion, engineers had accurately predicted many of the problems encountered, their concerns were ignored

because of MacArthur's desire to return to the Philippines as quickly as possible and a willingness among the top commanders to disregard the possibility of a strong Japanese reaction to the invasion.

Kenney and the other air commanders erred badly in their planning for Leyte. In addition to discounting the engineers' concerns they failed to recognize the important differences between earlier campaigns and the battle for air superiority in the Philippines. In previous operations in the Central and Southwest Pacific against isolated Japanese outposts with a limited number of airfields, it was possible to destroy every aircraft at a base and cutoff the flow of replacement planes. Neither was possible in the Philippines. The number of airfields scattered throughout the islands allowed the Japanese to disperse their aircraft, making it exceedingly difficult to find and destroy all of them, while the relatively short distance between Japanese-held Formosa and Luzon allowed the Japanese to pour large numbers of reinforcements into the fighting.

Changes in Japanese tactics exacerbated these miscalculations. In contrast to previous operations in which the Japanese sent out small numbers of aircraft and were largely ineffective in disrupting American operations, during the battle for Leyte the steady flow of reinforcements allowed the Japanese to use large formations. Additionally, they unleashed the deadly kamikaze attacks which proved almost impossible to stop. Problems in building the airfields coupled with miscalculations of the enemy forfeited the American advantage of air superiority. The combined effect of fighting without control of the air and the Japanese ground reinforcements sent to Leyte slowed the American advance and the conquest of Leyte. Nevertheless, Kenney proved

a quick study and learned from his experiences on Leyte. In the upcoming invasions on Mindoro and Luzon in the Philippines and the planning for the invasion of the Japanese home islands, he went to great lengths to ensure that his aircraft were in position to support the landing.

Although the threat posed by Japanese air attacks remained Kenney's first priority, aircraft under his command also flew other missions aimed at cutting off reinforcements and directly supporting the movement of the ground forces. After the Japanese withdrew their aircraft from the Philippines in early January, 1945, shortly after the landing on Luzon, Kenney no longer needed to be concerned about Japanese air attacks. The Japanese ground forces, having dug into mountain redoubts, had no supply lines or troop movements to be cut off. With two of the usual tasks obviated by the situation and a multitude of aircraft on hand, Kenney turned most of his planes loose on missions in direct support of the ground forces.

After American soldiers captured Manila in March, 1945, Kenney turned his attention northward. First, in support of the landings at Okinawa with attacks on the airfields on Formosa, and, later, in preparing for an American invasion of the Japanese homeland. In both cases, Kenney made few changes from the methods he had developed during the course of the war: first gain air superiority, then cut off the battle area, and, finally, on the day of the assault, put every available aircraft over the landing area. In the end, the dropping of the atomic bombs and the entry of the Soviet Union into the war made the planned invasion unnecessary.

Throughout the war, MacArthur and Kenney maintained a close professional and personal relationship and Kenney played an important role in shaping the general conduct of MacArthur's operations in the Southwest Pacific. In spite of their relationship, the two men did not always see eye-to-eye and it is clear that MacArthur only accepted Kenney's advice when it was in line with MacArthur's goals. For instance, MacArthur gladly followed Kenney's suggestions about the ways in which air power could help speed his advance, such as the airlifting of troops to New Guinea in 1942, to outflank the Japanese advance on Port Moresby, even though the plan drew dire warnings from the rest of MacArthur's staff. However, when Kenney attempted to dissuade MacArthur from a course of action, as he tried to do in warning about the risks involved in relying on carriers during the invasion of Hollandia, the warnings were ignored. In short, Kenney's influence on the actual conduct of the war varied to the extent that it was in agreement with MacArthur's overarching objective.<sup>9</sup>

Kenney's position as the theater air commander brought him into close contact with the other Army and Navy commanders. Although Kenney was an aviator, he was also a career Army officer. He had met many of his fellow Army officers in the theater before the war. Soon after taking command Kenney effectively by-passed MacArthur's difficult chief of staff, Major General Richard Sutherland, a man who had caused a great deal of problems for the previous air commanders. Although Kenney's personality was important in this confrontation, his prior dealings with Sutherland at

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<sup>9</sup> MacArthur's adherence to Kenney's advice closely parallels MacArthur's use of ULTRA. According to Edward Drea, "MacArthur consistently dismissed ULTRA evidence that failed to accord with his preconceived strategic vision." Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA, p. 230.

the Army War College also helped the airmen by giving him some insight into Sutherland's personality and character. Kenney had also known Generals Walter Krueger and Robert Eichelberger, the principal ground commanders, and worked closely with them in planning operations. Although both men criticized Kenney for problems encountered with bombing missions in close proximity to friendly ground forces, they registered few complaints about the priority Kenney placed on missions or his selection of targets.

In contrast with the generally good relations he had with Army officers, Kenney's relationship with the Navy was very adversarial. In the years prior to World War II, he had little personal contact with Naval officers and only limited education and training in naval warfare. The interservice rivalries of those years certainly influenced his attitude, particularly the tension between the Air Corps and the Navy over the mission of coastal defense and the control of aviation. During the war, he clashed frequently with a number of Navy officers. He had his most long-running disagreements with Admiral Daniel Barbey over methods for air operations during an amphibious landing. Barbey, an amphibious expert who arrived in Australia in early 1943, argued for the procedures used by the Navy. He wanted standing air patrols over the convoys and landings at dawn to hide the ships from the intended landing site under the cover of darkness and surprise the defending forces. Kenney, on the other hand, campaigned against standing air patrols as wasteful and inefficient and urged later landing times so that his aircraft could bomb the beaches just before the troops landed. In the end, various combinations of the methods were used in operations, but

the constant bickering between the services kept the disputes simmering. Throughout the war Kenney distrusted the Navy's intentions and remained extremely suspicious of attempts by naval officers to interfere in air operations. During the campaign on Leyte, Kenney's relations with Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, MacArthur's naval commander, soured, preventing the two from combining forces at a time when cooperation was badly needed. The weight of American material superiority masked many of the problems caused by conflicts between the services, but Kenney's combativeness did little to improve inter-service cooperation.

Although Kenney's direct superior was Douglas MacArthur, Kenney continued to depend on General "Hap" Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, for the supplies and people needed to fight the war. This dual loyalty between officers with very different perspectives and agendas created a source of tension and conflict for Kenney throughout the war. Arnold did his best, within the constraints of the strategic framework of the war, to accommodate Kenney's numerous requests and was generally impressed by Kenney's leadership and the ability of the air units in the Southwest Pacific to produce impressive results with a minimum of aircraft. By the middle of 1944, however, a variety of factors caused Kenney's relationship with Arnold to deteriorate. While Kenney and Arnold clashed over such things as rotating officers from Arnold's headquarters in Washington for combat duty in the theater and the low priority given to the Southwest Pacific for spare parts and people, their biggest disagreement was over Kenney's continued efforts to obtain the long-range B-29 bomber for MacArthur's theater. Arnold maintained that the aircraft could best be

used for the strategic bombing of the Japanese homeland, leading him to support efforts to base B-29s in China and later in the Marianas Islands. Kenney contended that the B-29s could best be used to bomb oil facilities in the East Indies and cut off shipping bringing the oil and other natural resources from that area to Japan, a plan that would have based the bombers in Australia.

Although Arnold grew tired of Kenney's insistent lobbying for the B-29s, Kenney's penchant for taking his grievances outside the bounds of the service was an even greater irritant. The most egregious example occurred in early 1944, with Kenney's assertion, along with other officers from MacArthur's command, that Japan could be defeated quicker by using the forces in the Central Pacific under Admiral Nimitz to advance MacArthur's Southwest Pacific drive to the Philippines. Arnold's reason for supporting a separate Central Pacific advance was to capture the Marianas Islands in order to provide air bases for the B-29 attacks on Japan. Kenney argued strongly against this logic, telling naval planners that basing the B-29 in the Marianas was a "stunt" and would only accomplish "nuisance raids."<sup>10</sup> Arnold found these disparaging comments about strategic bombing, made to officers outside of the Army Air Forces, particularly jarring. To Arnold and many other officers in the Army Air Forces, strategic bombing was the key mission for assuring an independent United States Air Force. While Kenney's loyalty to MacArthur was lauded by Arnold during combat operations, in arguing for the new bombers Kenney's actions made him appear

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<sup>10</sup> Kenney diary, January 27, 1944, KP; Letter, Kenney to Arnold, February 19, 1944, pp. 1-2, 4, Box 46, Murray Green Collection.



disloyal to the goals of airmen. Toward the end of the war Kenney managed to patch up his differences with Arnold. In March, 1944, with Germany close to defeat and the end of the war with Japan only a matter of time, both men turned their attention to future battles in Washington over an independent Air Force. Although Kenney remained loyal to MacArthur, he stopped his divisive comments and closed ranks with his fellow airmen over the coming inter-service disputes. The problem of dual loyalty Kenney faced was never entirely resolved; rather its importance ebbed and flowed over the course of the war. During the more critical times of the war Kenney put aside his service loyalty and sided with the theater commander. With the end of fighting in sight, however, loyalty to his service assumed a larger role given the more enduring tensions between the armed services of the United States.

As an air commander Kenney was fortunate to have several advantages. He served with a theater commander who learned to appreciate the benefits offered by air power and he enjoyed outstanding subordinates to carry out the plans he formed. Kenney also benefited from highly accurate intelligence about the enemy. Arguably, Kenney, of all the commanders in the Southwest Pacific, benefited the most from ULTRA, or signals, intelligence. Because radio communications were integral to all aspects of air operations, the ability to intercept and decode Japanese radio transmissions, even those of a routine nature, gave Kenney an extremely accurate picture of Japanese air strength and important advantages for making decisions. ULTRA allowed Kenney to concentrate on a single area without undue concern about air attacks or the size of the Japanese forces in other areas. It enabled him to choose

lucrative targets for large, concentrated raids, such as the bombing of the airfields at Wewak and Hollandia after the Japanese had sent in large numbers of reinforcements. Without this covert information Kenney would have been forced to carry out many missions against airfields that might, or might not, contained enemy aircraft. The more frequent raids would have had less impact on Japanese air operations while simultaneously wearing out Kenney's forces. Intercepted radio messages also provided a critical advantage in defending against enemy air attacks. ULTRA provided early warning of an impending air raid and gave Allied fighters enough time to gain altitude and be in a position to attack the Japanese formations before they reached their targets. In short, this intelligence advantage allowed Kenney to concentrate his air forces, both offensively and defensively, when and where they would have the greatest effect on Japanese operations.

Kenney also used ULTRA to great advantage in sealing off the Japanese garrisons. Searching for and finding ships in the vast expanses of the ocean was not an easy task. Without foreknowledge of the Japanese sailing schedules, Kenney would have had to assign more aircraft to scouting enemy ship movements, leaving fewer available to attack other targets. Dramatic successes as in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, in March, 1943, in which Kenney's aircraft destroyed a convoy bringing troops and supplies from Rabaul to New Guinea, would not have been possible. Although Kenney exercised little influence over establishing the intelligence network or shaping

its operating arrangements, he was an enthusiastic supporter and consumer of their efforts.<sup>11</sup>

Knowledge about the enemy's capabilities and intentions explain only part of Kenney's success; equally important was having enough aircraft available to carry out the missions. When Kenney first arrived in Australia, he faced a numerically superior foe and while the sensible use of intelligence to concentrate the air missions made up part of this deficit, building an effective supply and maintenance organization was also important to keeping a relatively larger proportion of his planes airborne. He moved the supply depots closer to the combat air bases and focused the people working in the rear-echelon on the goal of increasing the number of combat-ready aircraft. While pilots and other aviators received much of the publicity, Kenney realized the importance of the hard-working mechanics and armorers to winning the war and searched for ways to raise their morale by awarding military decorations and improving living conditions. Although the number of aircraft in his command increased slowly, the total number of sorties flown grew rapidly, through strenuous efforts aimed at flying the same few aircraft more often. Kenney also benefited from the enormous productive capacity of the United States during the war. While he never had as many aircraft as he thought he needed, the overall strength of the command did increase. By the time the war ended, Kenney had 1,800 aircraft, a large supply of spare parts, and

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<sup>11</sup> Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA. p. 231.

trained mechanics capable of keeping close to 80 percent of the aircraft flying at any given time.<sup>12</sup>

War, of course, is not a one-sided enterprise. The actions of one party cannot be judged against some absolute standard, but must be measured against a particular adversary at a particular moment in time. In this regard, Kenney's strengths and methods exacerbated the weaknesses of the Japanese. They never seriously considered the possibility that their radio codes had been broken, nor were they able to break the codes used by the Allies or exploit other areas of signals intelligence. Their intelligence weaknesses gave Kenney a sizable advantage in planning air operations.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Kenney benefited from an increasing material advantage during the war. Although Japanese aircraft production expanded throughout most of the war, it never kept pace with American production and the supply and maintenance organizations of the Japanese air arms were woefully incompetent. Similarly, the Japanese did not increase their pilot training programs until late, and as a result, Japanese pilots became less experienced and less capable as the war progressed. Although the lack of surviving sources makes it difficult to reconstruct an exact comparison, it appears that at the same time that Kenney's maintainers could keep 70 to 80 percent of the aircraft ready for combat, Japanese mechanics kept something less than 50 percent of their aircraft in flying shape. This combination forced the Japanese to launch missions with small numbers of aircraft piloted by ill-trained aviators,

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<sup>12</sup> USSBS, Fifth Air Force, pp. 11, 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Weinberg, pp. 551-553.

making them more vulnerable to the American defenders and resulting in greater losses.<sup>14</sup> Though not advantaged in terms of actual numbers of aircraft, Kenney nevertheless had an edge in the number of missions flown and the quality of the aviators he sent into combat.

Kenney's tactics also met with great success against the Japanese. The low-level attacks against merchant shipping were extremely effective and resulted in relatively few losses, largely because the Japanese ships were only lightly armed and ill-equipped to defend against air attacks. The relatively few anti-aircraft guns and the weaknesses in the air raid warning networks around Japanese airfields made low-altitude attacks against these bases effective and generally resulted in few American losses. A lack of heavy equipment and trained engineers hampered the ability of the Japanese to build airfields, further contributing to Kenney's success. Unable to disperse their aircraft around the perimeter of an airfield or build more bases, the Japanese clustered their aircraft in groups, making it easy to destroy large numbers at any one time. Additionally, the actual runways themselves were easily damaged and the lack of heavy equipment made it difficult to make repairs, quickly rendering the fields unusable.<sup>15</sup> Although the exact tactics Kenney advocated might not have been as successful in other combat areas, his mental flexibility and willingness to innovate suggest that he would have adapted to any situation.

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<sup>14</sup> USSBS, Japanese Air Power, pp. 14-15, 18-19.

<sup>15</sup> Kenney with Hasdorff, pp. 55-56

Kenney's actions in the war were partly the result of his pre-war thinking about air warfare and partly the result of adapting to the particular environment. He proved to be both well-prepared for his role and capable of accommodating a wide-range of problems, an important combination in any commander. He built and maintained a strong and effective working relationship with MacArthur while at the same time balancing the conflicting pressures on a theater air commander. Kenney loved flying, and was a fervent believer in air power, but he was not enamored of one type of aircraft, or one particular use of air power. George Kenney was a professional military officer who saw aircraft as weapons. The challenge for the theater air commander, he believed, was building an air organization that supported the many roles and capabilities of air power in modern warfare.

Throughout the war Kenney remained focused on using the advantages that air power offered, especially the ability to avoid large concentrations of enemy forces and outflank the enemy through the air. This task, however, first required gaining control of the air by defeating the opposing air force. This mission became Kenney's first priority and he continually preached the importance of air superiority to MacArthur. After neutralizing or defeating the enemy threat, aircraft could then be used to isolate the enemy positions, support the ground advance, or transport troops and equipment to the battle area. Although the basic strategy of outflanking the enemy is as old as war itself, MacArthur's campaign in the Southwest Pacific would not have been possible without air power. General George C. Kenney, MacArthur's airman, proved instrumental to the Allied victory.

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